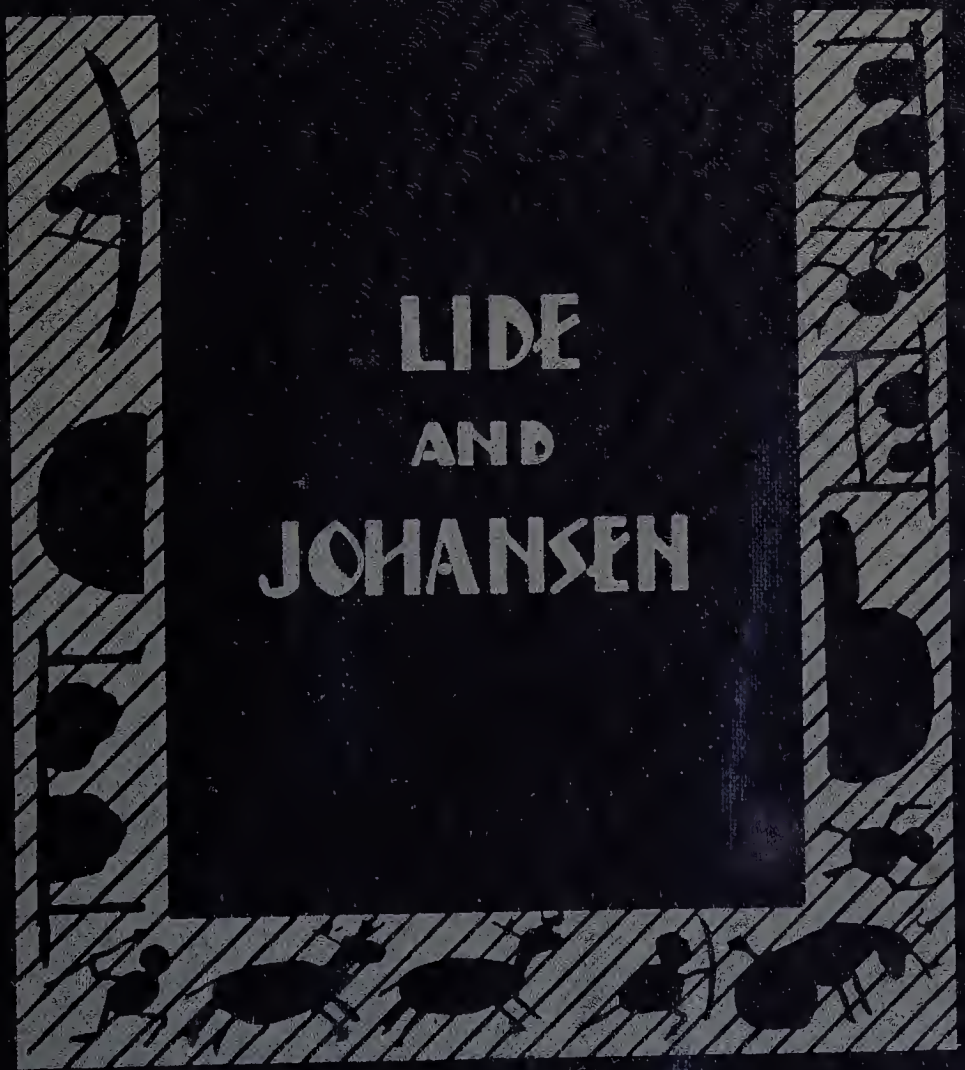
OOD-LE-UK THE WANDERER



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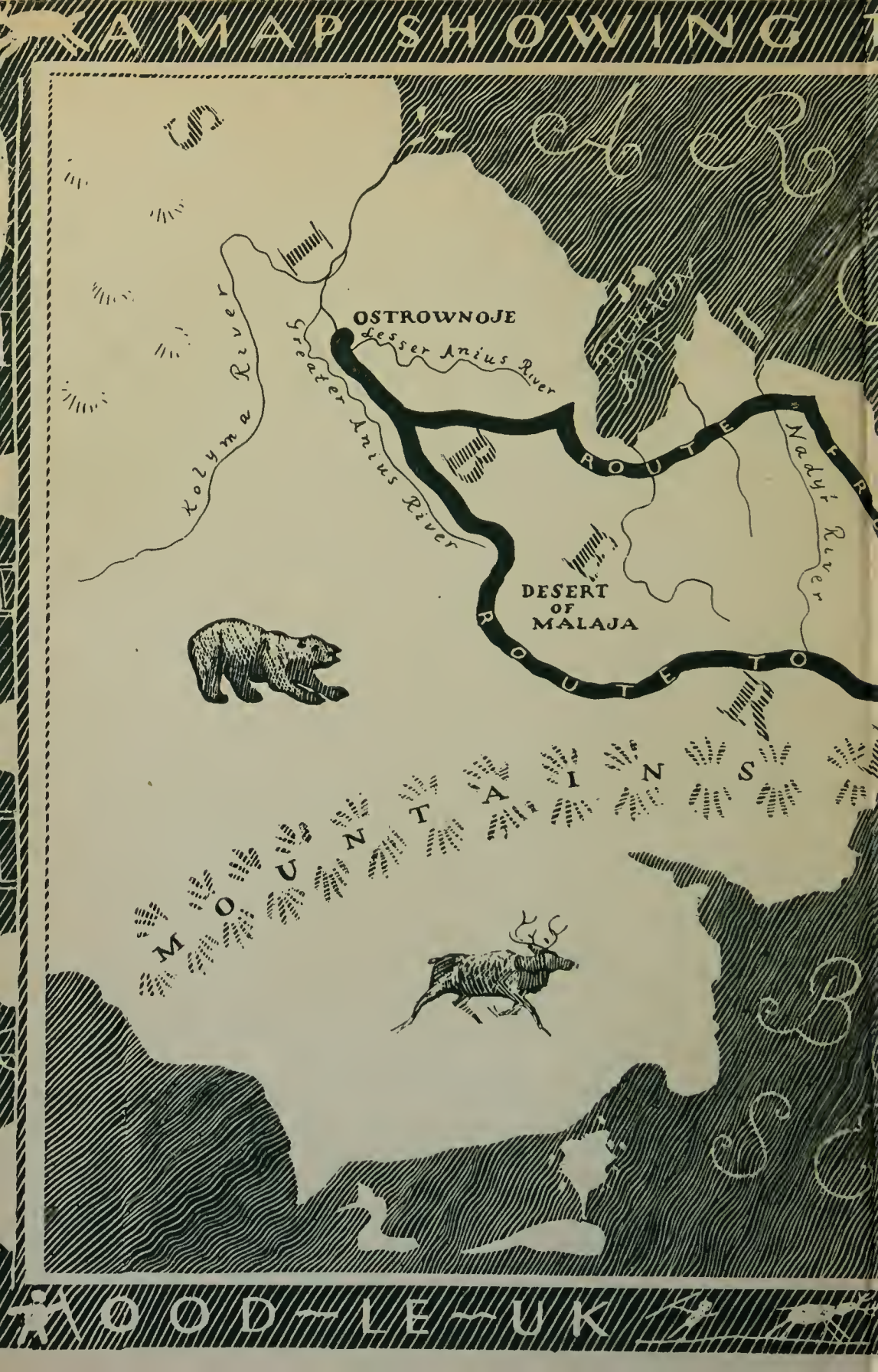
A MAP SHOWING
OSTROWNOJE
Lesser Anius River
Greater Anius River
Kolyma River
ROUTE
Nadyi River
DESERT
OF
MALAJA
ROUTE TO
MOUNTAINS
MOUNTAINS
KODLE-UK

THE WANDERINGS OF
FRANCES ISLAND
ISLAND OF MAMMOTH BONES
FAIRWAY
IGURKA
EAST CAPE
DIOMEDE ISLANDS
BOAT'S SEPTAWA OF THE ESKIMOS RETURN
ARCTIC OCEAN
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THE WANDERER

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OOD-LE-UK THE WANDERER

Lash of wind and wave swept the castaway on his ice raft farther and farther into the Arctic north.

OOD-LE-UK
THE WANDERER

BY

ALICE ALISON LIDE

AND

MARGARET ALISON JOHANSEN

ILLUSTRATED BY

RAYMOND LUFKIN

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To

Thomas Evan Lide

196501

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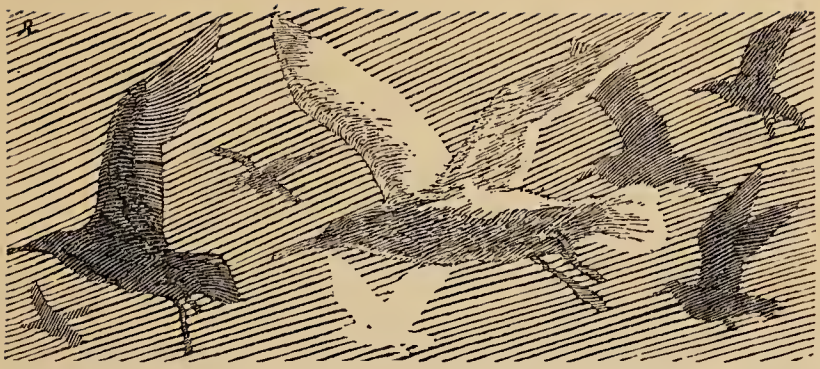

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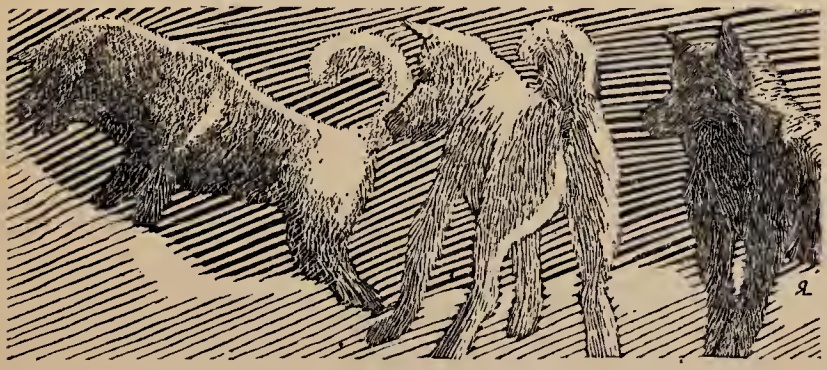
OOD-LE-UK THE WANDERER



CHAPTER I

OOD–LE–UK'S AMULET

"UGH! UP! I'm no wolfskin to be sat upon!" Ood-le-uk wriggled indignantly out from under his cousin, Putnuk, as the two of them rolled together in a snow hollow between the ice hummocks. In their tramp behind the sledges, they had bogged to their knees in an unsuspected snow pocket. Putnuk, with all the high spirits of a young Eskimo marching through daylight, after a winter of nighttime, had leaped with exuberant yells into the drift for a mock battle.

But Ood-le-uk was in no mood for gayety. As he blinked the snow out of his black eyes, he wished enviously that he felt as rollicking as the husky Putnuk. His own heart lay chilly as a lump of blubber beneath his double fur shirt. Fear rode him. He was part and parcel of a whale hunt — and Eskimo whaling, done with a bone harpoon pointed with slate, was an almost superhuman feat. It meant long hours in a skin canoe,

a battling through icy waters, a continuous danger from the smashing blows of the monster's fluke.

Right now Ood-le-uk and all the males of the village were crossing dark sea-ice out to its edge where the floes of the spring break-up rode grinding and crashing up the north channel, and where death lurked at every turn.

An Eskimo, especially an Eskimo like Ood-le-uk of that Arctic land where Alaska juts out into the sea, called Bering Strait, above Onzebue Sound, must have no room in his heart for fear. In these ice barrens man must literally snatch his daily meat from the jaws of death.

Unfortunately, the undersized Ood-le-uk feared many things. He hoped none else knew how his heart turned to water at the shout of "Bear! Bear!" or how the shivers prickled his spine when the wail of the wolf pack split the air.

But as though to compensate the small, runty, fur-clad youngster for his timidity, Nature had made a strange gift to Ood-le-uk. She had presented him with an imagination, a thing Eskimos are not given to possessing. When at the close of the long, dark winter, these North folk crept up out of their underground huts to watch

the spring break-up of the floes and the towering bergs riding grandly out to sea, the average Eskimo saw only ice — ice that perhaps had a meal or two on it for him, a white bear on some ice crest or black dots which were a seal herd, sunning itself on shelf ice. Ood-le-uk saw the majestic, drifting bergs as huge, crystal crafts, sailing — where? Ah, where! He longed desperately to know what far waters the sea bergs rode, what lands they touched upon. But his imagination could only grope. His was so narrow a world.

In the stirring modern era of to-day, the white man's *oomiakpuk,* or big steamer, has many times crossed that stretch of waters called Bering Strait, which lies between Alaska and the shores of Asia. But in the old days, when Ood-le-uk lived, — many hundred suns ago, as the North people count years, — there was no visitation between the small, fur-clad Eskimos of America and the small, fierce, fur-clad Tschuktschi tribesmen of the Siberian Arctic. At least there were no visitings in person. In fact there had been none since the ages gone, when Bering Strait was not a water way at all, but a ridge of land over which, along with the hairy mammoth and the broad-

faced ox and the ancestor of the reindeer, the stone-age man, who was the ancestor of the Eskimo, crossed from Asia into America. Then eons ago the cold waters of the north swept over the land strip, and communication between the continents ceased — anyway, ceased so far as Ood-le-uk's people knew.

But for all that, as the years rolled by, there was communication of a sort. Now and again, the sea currents swept strange things ashore that made them know that there were other humans in the world besides their own folk. Once it was a huge Siberian larch log with a metal axe blade half buried in it. To the Eskimos, this unbreakable implement was a strange, almost worshipful object, far different from their stone axes that cracked with hard usage. Still other things came to Alaska out of the unknown. Twelve moons ago, Ood-le-uk himself had found in the sea drift a bit of deerskin with blue beads sewed upon it; and again, the ice brought him an ivory knife with a curving blade. These things stirred and excited Ood-le-uk strangely. He prized them for the visions they brought him, prized them as greatly as his fellow tribesmen cherished a trusty spear

or a flint scraper. Many a time when he should have been tracking hares or watching for the slightest quiver of the ivory probe in a seal hole, he forgot his hunger and let his eyes search the ice floe for some other gift of the sea that might perchance have washed in from afar. Such gifts came rarely, mayhap twice or thrice in the life span of an Eskimo.

But this very day, as Ood-le-uk toiled along the sea edge to the camp site, laden with a pack of sealskin floats and a great, slate-pointed harpoon, his sharp eyes sighted perhaps the strangest thing that ever came across the sea in a polar current. In a fragment of drift ice washed in upon the floe, Ood-le-uk found it — a tiny wooden case no bigger than half the width of his palm. Fastened to it was an ivory ring through which, perhaps, a neck cord had once been passed. The two wooden sides fitted snugly together, staunchly protecting what was within.

Ood-le-uk's heart half suffocated him with its beating. Excitement surged over him in waves. It was an excitement that the stolid, husky Putnuk would never understand. Putnuk would laugh at him for thrilling to a "something one

could not eat." So Ood-le-uk turned away from his cousin to further examine this new treasure. By its cord ring it seemed this was something to be worn, a charm, an amulet for luck, like enough. What manner of person had fashioned this thing? What lay treasured between those tight, wooden sides? His hands trembled as he shifted his pack and drew out from his boot pocket a bit of flint with which to pry the edges apart. But he got no further in the solution of this small, far-traveled mystery. The voice of Katok, his father, rumbled back to him from up ahead, "On, laggard, — there be need of haste."

Ood-le-uk shamedly thrust his treasure out of sight beneath his fur shirt and took up the trail again, staggering a little under his load. Katok the Hunter was right; there was need of haste. Already the men had been twenty-two hours crossing the floe, a long dog-march of thirty miles up ridges of pressure ice, down ice gully, over black ice and thin ice, and beset with all the other dangers the frozen sea spews up in puny man's path.

Hunger went with the hunters, and hunger was left behind them in their home village, Tekelerik, back on the land ice. Tekelerik consisted of seven

underground *innies* or huts roofed in whalebone and earth. The largest *innie* of the village belonged to Katok the Chief, father of Ood-le-uk. In it Nup-su, the mother, and Illi and Taloka and Kee-tas and Nuk and A-vik, the five small children, anxiously awaited the meat Katok and his son must bring.

The party of hunters at last reached the sea edge. That meant the end of their journey, but not the end of their labors. In fact, to the weary Ood-le-uk it seemed that their labors had just begun. There was everything to do. This ice barren, a dog-march from home, must be converted into a comfortable camp. Because it was *Upernasak,* the time of the Arctic spring, the sun stayed always in the sky. High up behind the clouds, it shed a mysterious, gray light over all the northern world. Here now was no definite day and night. Men worked until they dropped, then slept.

Despite their weariness, Katok's hunters moved with that deft, sure quickness characteristic of the Eskimo. Under their long knives, wind-packed drift-snow was cut into blocks. Attoyu, Katok's brother, made a big circle on the ice with

his knife and stood in the center of it. Men brought him the snow blocks. He set them in place, one curving line above another curving line, up and up, until the key block set in the center completed a snug, dome-shaped hut. Then Attoyu, who had built himself in, cut a doorway, low down at the bottom of the hut wall, and crawled out.

Farther on, at the very edge of the floe, other building operations were going forward. Walls of ice were set up here, both to serve as wind-breaks and to screen the hunters from the sight of their sea quarry. Ranged around it were pieces of ice cut out for seats. Also, behind the ice screen was hacked a sort of runway. On this was set the skin oomiak, the open boat, ready to be slipped into the water in a second. The great oomiak had crossed the thirty miles of ice lashed to an eighteen-foot sledge and drawn by a team of shaggy, plume-tailed huskies or wolf dogs. From other sledges, the rest of the equipment was unloaded, the harpoons of whalebone, sealskin floats, coiled ropes of walrus sinew, short, thick bows of driftwood, a sheaf of stone-headed arrows.

The last coil of line was laid down; every spear and harpoon was set in its appointed place. Katok told off half his crew to watch. The other half could sleep. All things were ready. From now on there must be made not the slightest noise in the ice camp. If men moved, they went on tiptoe. Instead of talk, one made silent signs with the hands. No sound at all must reach the ears of a whale traveling the whale-channel that led up through the Strait into the polar sea. Since all time, as far back into the past as the traditions of men went, the great bowhead had followed this age-old whale path on its summer pilgrimage into the Arctic. Whence came the bowhead and whence went the bowhead, the little brown men of the North knew not. They knew only that they must strike while the whale run was on. To-day, to-morrow, ten sleeps away might be the time of sighting a great, gray, humped, and hulking mass drifting up channel close to the Alaskan ice edge. Until the run was on, man could only tighten his wolfhide belt and wait.

Ood-le-uk huddled back on an ice block between Katok and Putnuk. Across from him sat Ituk and Kunay, leathery-faced old hunters with

weird tattoo marks reaching from brow to ear, tribal honor signs for prowess. Grouped in regular intervals along the sea wall sat other silent Eskimos. The gray, diffused light of the clouded sun made even near-to-hand things, such as one's neighbors, seem distorted and unreal. No sound broke the waiting save the treacherous grind of slush ice moving north with the current. Ood-le-uk fought off sleep, fought off horror of what was soon to happen to him, horror of icy water, death, this great monster of the deep that they waited for. He strove, instead, to hold his wavering mind upon this pleasant thing that lay beneath his fur shirt warm against his brown skin — this unknown amulet in its wooden case. But black weariness overcame his small tired body, he slept without meaning to do so.

Then suddenly he was awake, standing bolt upright in the midst of lightning activity. The height of the hunt was on; he was in the midst of it, and he was afraid. A very nausea of fear held him stricken motionless when he should have been in action.

Beyond the ice edge a long, gray monster had eased itself to the channel surface. For a moment

it had lain, a still, gray mountain upon the water; then it had spouted, a long-held breath that split the air like thunder and shot high a water column.

Ere that water column had descended, the hunters were after their quarry. From the ice edge, two harpooners hurled their weapons. Other men grabbed up the sealskin floaters, the spears, the extra harpoons. The oomiak shot down its runway into open water, every man in his place. Ood-le-uk the coward was snatched up and flung into his seat by some strong arm. A bone blade was thrust into his hands, and a stern voice whispered, "Paddle — for your life!"

It was paddle for life, or for death — more likely death, it appeared. The whale, pierced by the line-bearing harpoons flung from the boat itself, swerved about and lunged madly for freedom. His speed uncoiled the whale-line with a hissing whir and drew fathoms of it smoking across the gunwale. Behind him, the oomiak shot through the water desperately, to do battle. Roped to the wounded monster was this frail, skin boat. Where the whale went — to the farthest north, to the sea bottom, beneath the ice — there must the oomiak go, so long as the harpoon line

held. And some one of the harpoon rawhides would hold. Already there were three corded weapons in the creature. Now it was young Putnuk of the strong arm who stood rigid in the canoe bow and flung another barbed spear. It was an impossible shot, hurled on the wing, so to speak, yet it hit the mark.

"E-ya! E-yi-yi-yi!" burst from the throats of the hunters, only to be plunged to silence in icy water.

As the monster dived and whirled, the skin boat now shot under water, now seemed to cleave the air, speeding with the wind roaring past. Once the craft slammed into the sea water sidewise, and a dozen good spears and half the human occupants seemed lost. But, a miracle! The whale had spent his strength and struggled no more, and gave the men a chance to haul those overboard back to safety.

It was ended. The death spot back of the "hump" had been pierced. The whale was killed. While it had lasted, the struggle had been terrific. A score of times every man of Tekelerik village had tasted death.

But now both danger and numbing exhaustion

were forgotten in the excitement of achievement. The giant trophy was towed in and made fast to the ice with walrus-hide thongs. The bowhead was too monstrous a thing for men even to contemplate the hauling of its carcass clear up on the ice. So there, waist deep and braced against an Arctic current, these hardy ones set about cutting up their meat and feasting as they worked. Stone axes and polished, edged, stone knives came into play. In long, broad bands were stripped off portions of the tough, black, upper skin and the silver white of the belly skin. Beneath the hide lay the blubber, two feet thick and rich with oil. To these fur-clad men, a whale meant wealth, vast wealth. Here in his carcass was bone material for the making of every necessity, from sledge frames, boat frames, and house rafters to weapons, spoons, dishes, and needles. And on this bony framework hung tons of flesh, food to fill every hut in the village with feasting.

Already those hungry ones back at the *innies* of Tekelerik were being prepared for. Onto one of the long sledges, seal-hide sacks of whale meat were being roped into place. A string of dogs were buckled into harness. Now only a driver

was needed to mush with the load back across the ice to Tekelerik.

Ood-le-uk, his mouth full of sweet fat, his lean, little stomach well filled with blubber, his ears happy in the rhythmic swing of the whale song the men chanted at their work, felt suddenly a heavy hand laid upon his shoulders. It was the hand of Katok, his father, and the leathery, weathered face of the hunter was stern. Silently, he laid the long dog whip in his son's hands and pointed to the waiting sledge. As silently, Ood-le-uk accepted his command, turned about, flicked the long lash over the impatient team, and hand on sledge handles, mushed after them to the landward.

Ood-le-uk knew full well why it was he upon whom the lot had fallen to go trekking homeward like a woman alongside a load of meat. He was a weakling and full of fears, in no wise like his cousin, Putnuk, that black-browed one, fearless and rollicking. Ood-le-uk winced as he thought of the look in his father-the-chieftain's face when young Putnuk, whose well-flung spear had helped end the whale, had been honored in the procession of the whale dance when the

hunters, in stamp step, paced the intricacies of a tribal dance. He, Ood-le-uk, all of fifteen years old and the son of the chief, had had to be forced into danger and held up by the ears, as it were, to his duty. He was no good; none needed him out here in the midst of life and danger. So unto him had fallen the unpleasant lot of packing home the meat, while back at the ice camp was staged the man feast and the songs and the chanted story-telling of other great hunts.

Across the bleak loneliness the boy stumbled on behind his dog team. Turmoil was in his heart. Always he was fighting against fear, yet always fear dominated him in the end. It was hard, it was cruel to have been born thus. The slender body within its shaggy fur garment trembled at the force of emotions. Tears stung his eyelids and froze in a frosted beading along his lashes. As he followed the sledge handles, mechanically braking the load down ice slides, or shoving with all his strength on some up-pull, the boy strove to turn his bitter thoughts from himself out into the pleasant land of dreams. The boat he was building! Ice caves beyond the great falls! How he'd train the puppies of Kyo, his wolf dog! But black-

ness hung over him. He had shamed his father. This pushed all other thought from him.

A wild howl from the huskies brought him up short out of his gloom. The hind dogs crouched back on their haunches for dear life, while the lead husky half-dangled over an abyss. The sea ice had cracked asunder. Fathoms of black water lay between Ood-le-uk and the land ice.

With a whimper of terror, the boy backed up his team, wheeled it about, and made off up his own fresh trail toward the camp on the sea edge. There only lay safety now. At the whale camp were boats and strong men to row them.

But Ood-le-uk was doomed never to reach the boats. Miles up the trail another great chasm yawned before him. He was alone, cut off on this awful drift ice. Every year the drift ice took its toll of human life. Some hunter walked out on the floe and was never heard of again. Eventually he, Ood-le-uk, would be as those lost ones, gone to join the dead by the long, slow torture of starvation. He had food now, but after a while the food would be gone.

With a strangled cry he fell half-fainting across the ice, in his heart a prayer to all the wild spirit

gods of his belief. Let death claim him now — and quickly! His frail body had fought long against the odds, but it could fight no more. It was terribly weary. A comforting, black stillness began creeping, creeping over his brain.

Then a warm tongue in his face lapped him back into reluctant consciousness. Old Kyo, his dog, nuzzled against him. Kyo had puppies over there on the mainland. She couldn't give up — yet. The grizzled, old huskie pawed at her master, rolled him over. As he moved, something within his shirt slid warmly across his breast. The strange amulet! Numbly, Ood-le-uk reached in a hand and drew it out. He would cast the thing from him. It had brought him no luck, only shame.

But like some strange fire in his brain burned the boy's imagination. It was bigger than his frail body. It could not die. The spark of life in Ood-le-uk flared faintly, then burned higher. He must see, he must know what lay within that packet. For a second time he pried with the flint at the fitted, wooden edges. At last they fell apart. Within lay a piece of parchment covered in small, black marks and the whole folded about a bit of

crossed metal. The thing lay in his hand, gleaming whitely in the light. Of a truth it must be strong medicine, an amulet charm of great worth. As he stared down at it, it stirred Ood-le-uk. His mind awoke, went daydreaming into space. From whence had come this thing? Whose hand had laid it in its wrappings between the two sides of the wooden locket?

Kyo rubbed her body against him, turned her muzzle towards the shore, and whined.

Ood-le-uk rose stiffly to his feet. The packet he clamped together again and thrust into his garment. Then prosaically enough he began to hack off from the sledge load food for himself and the dogs. But in his eyes burned a light. He would not give up until he must.

Back again to the landward edge of the drift he began to make his way. By the time he achieved it, he was sore and aching in every muscle. Occasionally now the huskies left footmarks of little red spots that were drops of blood from their feet. Pressure ice makes a hard, jagged trail.

For all his pains, this thing that he had achieved was nothing — a great strip of black water lay between him and land. The boy shouted

himself hoarse, and his dogs lent a chorus of far-flung howling. But none heard them, and the black water continued to widen.

Ood-le-uk pushed on down the floe edge. Perchance the water chasm narrowed in this direction, perchance a current would swing the water ice grinding against the land ice. A quickly moving, perilous bridge, but it could be crossed in a moment!

The demon of a current swept the ice in tantalizing fluctuations. Now it swung in close, scarce a sledge length distant; now it swung out. Close in, far out, close in, far out! It was maddening. Then with an icy clutch at his heart, Ood-le-uk noticed that the in-swing was not so close, was ever widening, in fact.

It must be now. He must cross at the next pull of the current.

No, no, never! It was the impossible! He could not do it!

His brown face blanched at the agony of cross-purposes rending him.

Then he put up his hand and touched the mysterious amulet that lay against his skin. He set his teeth hard and fell to work at a strange

business, pushing and shoving at first one and another of some ice boulders that lay along the floe.

Afar into the inland across that black water, women and children waited hungrily for meat. He, Ood-le-uk, had meat; he must get it to them.

Like one crazed, the Eskimo youth hacked and chopped at upthrust ice knobs.

When next the floe followed the current shoreward in a curving arc, the stretch of dark water still showed full eighteen-feet wide — as wide as the great sled was long. In depth it was fathoms deep, between its two walls of solid ice. At the inswing of the floe, Ood-le-uk worked fast, and faster. His mind was made up, and he dared not let himself think of the danger he was plunging into. Already he had the dog rope knotted about his waist. Now he began shoving his ice chunks into the water, a half a dozen of them, one behind the other, to form a reeling, rocking, floating set of stepping stones. It looked more like a death trap than a bridge. Ood-le-uk, crouching on the ice brink above, shut his eyes tightly — to shut out terror. Then he opened them wide. It must be now — the jump . . . He was going! He leaped for the nearest block. His foot slipped; he

sprawled across it, dizzily regained himself, and went leaping on to the next and the next bobbing float. Then he was clawing his fingers into the land ice, scrambling weakly up to fall in a huddle on the blessed solidity of it.

There was no time for even a moment's rest. Tugging stubbornly against Ood-le-uk's taut body line, the dogs bunched in terror and howled lugubriously from the sea ice. Old Kyo, the hind wheeler, added her nips and coaxing whines to the Eskimo boy's frantic urging. All was vain. The huskies dug their toenails into the ice brink and sat solidly on their haunches. Then old Kyo was amongst them like a fury, ripping, slashing with bared yellow fangs, until with despairing yowls the whole fighting mêlée slid bodily into the water. After that it was a mere matter of seconds until the team swam frenziedly on across, scrambled up the land edge. With the boy straining with them began the tug to haul the sled also to safety. Its length nearly bridged the gap, but not quite. Load and all, it submerged, and with agony had to be dragged from its water plunge and up the steep ice slides by a team that flattened bellies to the very ice pack. Luckily, the well-

knotted thongs held the load in place. A mighty, concerted effort — the sled was hauled partially up on the ice — was all the way up. It was safe, safe!

After rest in the shelter of a snow hollow and food to replenish their burnt-out energies, boy and dogs took up the land trail toward Tekelerik.

Some eight hours later, a small battered figure mushed a half-dead dog team into the home village. It was Ood-le-uk. Because of faith in a strange amulet that lay against his breast, he had lived to bring meat to the starving ones.

CHAPTER II

WEAPONS OF BONE

CR-EAK — crash!

Ood-le-uk halted his bone cracking to listen, scared, to the sounds breaking the stillness.

Cr-eak — cr-eak — crash! There it came again, louder! His ears told him it was merely ice floes grinding each other under the wind, but his fears said it was goblins — goblins and all such evil ones fighting out there under the dark storm cloud that hid the pale, Arctic sun ball and shrouded the land in a mysterious grayness. He shivered and stirred the wicks in the potstone lamp so the flame flared a little higher. One had need of light at this time, with both Father Katok and Mother Nup-su away at the hut of the medicine man, leaving on his shoulders all the responsibility of protecting the younger children: Illi, who had already seen eleven summers; the eight-year-old laughing Taloka; Kee-tas and

Nuk, the four-year-old boy twins; and A-vik, the fat, brown baby.

Ood-le-uk rolled an extra ice stone against the bottom of the caribou robe that served as door curtain. *Ai,* he hoped all was bright and tight against any spirit of evil that wanted to slip in and lay a curse upon them.

The boy felt safe enough from prowling creatures, even from *nanook,* the fierce bear, for his father's *innie* was as strongly made as any in the village of Tekelerik. Like most of the other huts it was dug down into the ground, and floored and walled with driftwood, and its roof was made of stout rafters of whale rib covered over with many feet of earth to keep out the cold. A slit in the roof served as a chimney, and a tunnel-like hole at one side did duty as a passageway. Altogether, it was a snug and comfortable little home, especially when the stone lamp added its warm, yellow glow.

So, to ordinary dangers Ood-le-uk now gave no heed, but he could not keep his thoughts from the legends old Ituk used to tell him of *Doruk,* the great wolf whose fur is ever white, who leads her pack down into the water where they become

killer whales, those wolves of the sea that destroy every living thing they meet.

Again the noise beat upon the children's ears, a fierce blast that roared off into silence.

"Ayi ai," wailed little A-vik, burrowing down beneath the thick, skin rugs that covered the floor.

Nuk and Kee-tas took up the refrain, *"Ayi ai, ayi ai."* They were scared, and Ood-le-uk was scared, too, though he tried to act grown-up and pretended that he knew it was only the wind.

Drawing the sobbing A-vik close, Illi tried to soothe her. "Hush, little winter bird, and I'll tell you a story about how our people came to the Northland."

In a low, sing-song voice the girl told one of the old, old legends of the Arctic, told of Ik-Suk the Mighty Hunter who once lived up in the sky beyond the flaming colors of the aurora. There were no men on earth then; only animals roamed the wide plains. One day as Ik-Suk leaned far over the edge of a cloud to admire a beautiful snow mountain beneath him, his foot slipped and he fell, down from the sky to the ground. He could never again reach his cloud home, so he

married the mountain, and all the people on earth are their children.

As Illi finished the story, Ood-le-uk's hands crept up to the amulet that hung from a cord around his neck, to the queer, foreign charm piece that only one moon past had given him courage to cross the broken ice and bring whale meat to the hungry women and children in the village. An exalted look was on his face; for the moment he was not afraid of anything, not even of the fearsome wails outside. They were all children of the Great Hunter, even as he was son of Katok the Brave One. Some day he, too, would be called the Brave One, Ood-le-uk the Mighty Hunter. It was a delightful thought to toy with. Some day he would slay the bearded walrus, the silver bear . . .

A shiver crept down the boy's spine. Would he ever be the hero of such brave deeds? To attack *nanook* one needed more than courage; one needed strength and weapons of much sharpness.

Sighing, he went back to his bone cracking. Mighty hunter or not, in the ice country one has to crack bones to live.

For the short, brown men of the Arctic highlands life was one long battle — though not with

each other. They were too good-natured for that. And anyway, nobody had time to be sticking knives into neighbors, when there were so many other things that had to be fought — the hunger, the cold, the fierce, prowling, white bear with his long, snaky head and black-tipped nose, the gaunt shadowy forms that were the wolf pack.

Against these terrible foes, the brown men had only weapons made of bone — just little pieces of bone. They had, of course, grown very skilled in the fashioning of these. Sharp-pointed splinters of bone made arrowheads. Long, polished portions of whale rib served as spears. Far from infallible, however, were these weapons. Sometimes the jaws of the polar bear crunched into the bone-shafted spear, splintering it to bits. Many were the fur-clad hunters who went out from their home *innies,* never to return again because of the ill-timed breaking of a weapon.

Ood-le-uk himself had once had a rather dreadful experience of this kind. It was the day his whalebone bow had snapped asunder as he bent it. After that he had spent an exceedingly uncomfortable night and half a day, perched up

on an ice ledge waiting for a wolf to get hungry enough to seek his dinner elsewhere.

But in spite of its drawbacks, a piece of bone was much better than nothing. And up in Ood-le-uk's land there was not anything else at all — no wood, nor iron, nor steel, nor brass, nor copper — just whale bones and bones of the white bear and the walrus and some stones on which to grind edges and points. Besides their weapons, these dwellers of the Arctic even achieved a few comforts out of bone. They shaped it into fish-hooks and long-handled spoons and needles with which to sew up their fur garments. And most useful of all, to a people whose food came largely from the sea, they shaped frames of bone and covered them with skins and made boats: the big oomiak that could hold many, and the one man kayak. Ood-le-uk, who was clever with his hands, had made an oomiak all by himself, only his was a tiny one, made as a toy for his little sister.

And sometimes these people took great, flat bones and made pictures on them, scratching deep with a flint point and rubbing in soot to make the lines show clearly. There were carvings of the spouting whale, of the little, red-legged

dovekie duck, of the wolf and the bear, and of Mit-wee, the snow hare. And once in a while the Eskimos made pictures of the spirits, those invisible evil ones whom they feared. Ood-le-uk had once sketched upon a bone fragment just exactly the way he thought an evil spirit looked. It was a hideous, big-headed thing which he drew, with short, twisted legs and hands that were long, oh, dreadfully long and black. On nights when the mad wind howled at the *innie* door, the Eskimos would shiver and huddle in a far corner. They thought an evil spirit was waiting outside to thrust in its black hands after them.

At this season of the year there was not much time for picture drawing. Like all the other villagers, Ood-le-uk was hard at it cracking bones and making arrowheads and spear points. It was almost the time of the summer migration across to the island of Sagastyr, where the Eskimos camped every year to hunt. Already the gulls and the screaming little auks and the eider ducks had come back to the north and were covering the island cliffs.

To the dwellers in the village of Tekelerik there was need of this trip to Sagastyr. The whale

hunting, after that first successful hunt, had been a sad failure. The ice on which the camp had been pitched had broken off from the mainland and had been borne out to sea by a northward current. The hunters had had to take to the boats and had barely managed to get the dogs and sledges and themselves to safety. The sweet, luscious whale fat they had had to abandon, the sledge-lead Ood-le-uk had taken to the village being all that was saved. So now there was hunger in some of the huts and much anxious preparation for the journey.

CHAPTER III

DRAGON STONE

ONLY two sleeps after the father and mother had returned from the home of the *angekok* or medicine man, to whom they had taken an offering of frozen seal liver that he might feast the spirits and thus secure their good will and assistance during the coming hunting, the household of Katok was in a bustle of excitement. The whale-rib sledge was loaded with weapons, cooking pots, and fur robes, and the dog team was harnessed to it, with wise old Pedtgo in the lead. A place was made on the sledge for Baby A-vik and for the chubby twins, Nuk and Kee-tas, for they were too little to walk so far.

All the children were in high spirits. Oodle-uk was strutting like a young puffin. The summer was in his veins. He felt like shouting and running. If Putnuk had not been so lordly over possessing a new, bone-tipped spear, he would have challenged him to a race in the snow.

Although the winter night had passed and summer had come, the thick-sheeted ice still held above the waters between Sagastyr and the mainland. On this frozen bridge the villagers of Tekelerik, with their long sledges and their dog teams, crossed. For a brief time they could stay and eat their fill of eggs and wild game; then they must travel back to the mainland before the ice cracked and drifted away.

This year the stay of the Eskimos upon the island was most brief. Strange and terrible things befell at Sagastyr in that early summer.

As usual, the travelers of the snow land set about making their island camp as comfortable as possible. Some repaired the tumble-down stone huts left from other years, roofing them with tent-like coverings of tanned hides and setting squares of seal transparencies into the walls for windows. Others built new huts of those materials which, in the north country, are always on hand — the snow and ice. Before too much smoke bedimmed them, these little crystal huts, with the glow of the lamps glinting right through their walls, were the prettiest things imaginable.

While the men hunted the walrus and the seal

on the shore ice, the women and children, armed with nets of cunningly knotted sinew cords, scaled the cliffs to bag fresh fowl and eggs among the teeming water birds that screamed in circles about them.

At nights there were feastings. It was good to have plenty of food once more. And on one of these nights, when the bone fifes shrilled merrily and a story-teller wove tales to the *boom-boom* of skin drums — a star fell. From somewhere out of the universe it came hurtling straight toward the earth. And as it fell, the whole snow world seemed on fire. To the Eskimos this was no star — but a fire-tailed dragon. When the meteor smote the layer of air surrounding the earth and with a roar of a hundred glacier crashes burst into a thousand pieces, the brown men thought the great dragon had burst into a thousand little dragons.

The pieces of the star flew every way. Some fell upon the ice mountains, burning great gashes and gorges into them. Above the hunting camp, blazing balls of flame zipped downward, burying a hut here, blowing one into fragments there. The Eskimos fled screaming across the sea ice toward the mainland. Behind them whirred and

fluttered in panic the sea birds. And the wild beasts, crouched in their lairs, answered roar for roar to the star thunders.

It was a night of horrors. Ood-le-uk was frightened, as was everybody else. He thought it was the end of the world and the skies were falling. On and on he ran, as fast as his legs could carry him. Once he felt a thud on the back. That it was a fire-tailed dragon pursuing him he was sure. He even smelled the fumes of his fur garment scorching under the evil one's breath! But it must have been a very little fire-tailed dragon for Ood-le-uk's legs kept right on running, and soon he was beyond that fearsome circle where the star stones fell.

Ood-le-uk's own father and mother and the five youngsters passed safely through the ordeal, but from many of the village huts there was gone a strong hunter or a mother and her children, lost during that terrible night on Sagastyr. For the space of a moon the Eskimos darkened their faces with soot of seal oil and mourned the lost ones. They moved inland and turned their backs on Sagastyr Isle. It was a place of terror, no more to be visited by man. And into the unwritten sagas

And on one of these nights . . . a star fell.

that were sung of nights while the potstone lamps guttered and flared was woven how the evil ones claimed the isle for their own and had driven men forth with fire darts and balls of flame.

The brief Arctic summer was gone before Ood-le-uk found the thing in the fur hood of his *parka* or coat. It was a little, round, black pellet, heavier than ice, heavier than stone. Where it had come from, he knew not, nor how long it had been lodged in the peak of his down-dropped hood. Then a little shiver of remembrance ran over him. Could it — could it be the remnant of that ball of dragon fire that had struck him between the shoulders on that terrible night at Sagastyr? He wrenched the hood inside out. Yes, there was a little, scorched line running through the fur to the hood point! And he had been wearing this thing on his back all these moons! In a fury of fear Ood-le-uk seized a stone and began to pound the black pellet— but the stone broke to pieces against the black pellet, and the black pellet remained whole. Then was Ood-le-uk very frightened indeed. All in a tremor he buried the thing in the ground and piled rocks on it and went away.

One day while Ood-le-uk was hunting the white hare high up in a mountain pass, he came upon some stones, smooth, oblong, and hard, harder than any stones he had ever seen before. So he thrust one into the *pooksak* or shoulder bag that hung on his back and brought it home. And because he had not forgotten where he buried the black pellet, he could not resist digging it up and pounding it with the smooth oblong rock. This time a strange thing happened. The black ball flattened slightly under the heat of his blows, and a whitish edge appeared on one side. He ran an experimental finger along this and cut a gash from which the blood spouted. *Ai,* the thing cut more sharply than ever any knife of bone or ivory could!

For a long time Ood-le-uk struggled between his fear of the thing and his desire to use it as a weapon. The instinct of the hunter was not strong within him, but his heart was heavy because Putnuk, who now considered himself a man since his spear had slain the huge bowhead whale, had taunted him with being fit to do only woman's work. It was true, Ood-le-uk knew that he would rather make than destroy. He could build an ice

hut as neatly as anybody, and he liked to carve in bone and wood. But this was not a hunter's work; none of this would earn him the coveted title of Ood-le-uk the Brave. To be a hero he must overcome fierce animals and bring in much food to his people. And this keen-edged thing from the spirit land, fearsome as it was, could help him in the struggle to win respect. It cut too splendidly to be cast aside.

In the end, the boy bound the crude blade to his spear haft with thongs of leather.

After that Ood-le-uk's fame as a hunter began to spread. Though he was but a youth, and slender and small at that, he brought in meat and several seal furs to be chewed and tanned by Mother Nup-su and Illi.

Then one day Ood-le-uk hurled his knife-shod spear too hard. It sped far beyond the leaping caribou and fell into an ice cravasse — one of those narrow, bottomless gulches of the glacier lands. It was gone forever now. In a way the boy was relieved. He had always been a little afraid of the knife made of the dragon stone, even though he had killed much game with it and Putnuk had looked on it enviously.

Ood-le-uk's relieved feelings did not last long, however. The dark Arctic winter began to descend. Animal life became more and more scarce in the snow plains. The few caribou and the tough old he-bears that had not hibernated now seemed harder than ever to kill with dull, bone weapons. Many a time Katok and the other hunters returned from the chase empty handed. Ood-le-uk came to miss his knife-edged spear terribly. Once he even tried to climb down into the crevasse after it. But that was hopeless, even as he had known to begin with, so he soon gave up the attempt.

In that winter matters became very bad indeed with the little band of Eskimos beyond the Arctic rim. Never at any time was there enough to eat. Mother Nup-su even tried stewing the wiry, bitter snow moss, and all the villagers took to chewing the harness leather.

It was the piteous sight, however, of thin little A-vik trying to eat old scraps of walrus hide that settled the matter for Ood-le-uk.

In doing that which he was planning to do, he would surely die. But then, they'd all be gone of the hunger sickness soon, anyway, if something

were not done. And — well, it would be better to die in the trying. As had become a habit with him, the boy's hand crept to the amulet within his fur shirt. This strong medicine had given him courage once. Perhaps it would give him courage now to see this dreadful experience through.

Although Ood-le-uk started on his journey in a morning, there was no sun to light him on his way, only a great, pale moon and the ghostly, wavering streamers of the north lights. For this was winter, and the sun had gone away from the ice country for six whole months. Ood-le-uk and his father's sledge and the poor, thin dogs traveled west, always to the west. When night came, they huddled in snow caves for shelter and each morning pushed wearily on. At last they left the land and went forward over the thick sea ice until they came again to more land. And now, if Ood-le-uk had not been so very weak from hunger, he might have turned about and fled. For this place he had come to was none other than Sagastyr Isle. The boy shut his eyes and seemed to see again the flaming trails of the fire dragons beating earthward out of space, seemed to hear again the thunder crashes of the hurtling meteor, the screams of

men and beasts. *Ai,* it was dreadful! How could he go on into this place of the evil ones?

But when he opened his eyes, the hideous vision vanished. There was silence, nothing but silence on Sagastyr now. This in itself was bad enough. It seemed as though death hung over the island.

Ood-le-uk had to force his trembling knees to carry him across the strip of ice-bound shore into the land. All about him was desolation. The huts had fallen into stone heaps, from some of which dangled tattered strips of hide that had once been roof covers. And all about and between the huts, great, black, lumpish things protruded from the snow. *Ai,* the black things! They were what had fallen from the sky on that night of terror. They were no longer fiery now, just dark and cold. Some of the lumps rounded upward like *toopics* or tents. One looked like a squatting old woman, and scattered about her were a pack of smaller lumps — her dogs, perhaps!

Before Ood-le-uk had time to become any more frightened, he popped three small lumps into his sledge and returned across the ice floe to the mainland. He had obtained what he came for, iron, or dragon stone as he called it, to carry home to his

people, that they might beat it off into slivers and splinters for arrow point and spearhead and knife blade. With such weapons as these they could conquer the famine and bring in meat for all, meat for feasting even and many fine fur robes with which to line the *innies* and make them all warm and cozy.

CHAPTER IV

MONARCH OF THE NORTH

OOD-LE-UK thought the proudest moment of his life had been reached when the men of Tekelerik thanked him for his gift of nickel-iron from which to make the deadly knives and spear-heads, and praised his bravery in going alone to the fearsome Sagastyr Isle. But that moment of satisfaction, complete as it was, was as nothing to the thrill of pride that came to him later.

Patiently, through the darkness of the long, Arctic night, old Ituk the Tattoed One, had chipped and pounded at a bit of the precious metal until he had fashioned a spearhead of amazing hardness and sharpness. And because of the magic of this strange, new weapon, food had come to the people and much honor to Ood-le-uk. When the whole village had seemed on the verge of madness from the hunger gnawing at their vitals, Ituk had crept out upon the ice to where a hummock of snow marked a seal's breathing hole.

Sitting there motionless, hour upon hour, in spite of the wind and the bitter cold, he had speared *ugruk,* the great, bearded seal. When he came dragging in his trophy, the villagers had gone wild, for it was the first meat that had been brought in for many sleeps. In their hunger, they would have fallen upon it, Katok and Ood-le-uk and all the rest, but Ituk had waved them back, insisting upon the observance of the ancient ritual. He made a sign to wrinkled old Eganak, his wife, and she fetched a vessel of clean snow water and poured it into the dead seal's mouth. This was to satisfy the seal spirit's craving for a drink of sweet water and to put the Eskimos on good terms with the spirit, so that they might have good hunting in the future. Then Ituk, with a great show of ceremony, cut off the head, and before the astonished company, presented it to the gaping Ood-le-uk, saying, "Good spear. Brave young man. Bring great gift to his people." By custom, the seal meat must be divided among all the inhabitants, but the head was a prized portion and belonged by right to the hunter, so this was a signal honor that had been conferred upon the boy. At that moment, when he saw the pride in

his father's eyes, Ood-le-uk felt that he had leaped into manhood.

After thus dramatically taking his place in the man circle of Tekelerik, Ood-le-uk was sure that at last he had conquered fear. He walked proudly, looked Putnuk straight in the face, and did no more of the women's work in helping Nup-su about the hut.

Sooner than he had expected, however, this new courage of his was put to the test. When the breaking up of the ice came, Katok announced that they would hunt the white bear, and as a matter of course, Ood-le-uk was included among the hunters.

There were five in the chosen group: Katok and Ood-le-uk, his son; Attoyu and Putnuk, his son; and old Ituk, who had the wisdom of many winters. Ood-le-uk's was the last sledge, for, being the youngest, he waited until the others started. Then his whip curled over the back of Pedtgo, the big, black lead dog, and off they dashed down the trail of hard-packed snow.

"Ee-yi-yi-yi-yi," Putnuk shouted.

"Ee-yi-yi-yi-yi," Ood-le-uk answered.

After a while the first mad rush of the frisky

dog teams slowed down into a steady gait. Ood-le-uk was actually off on a bear hunt now, a man among other men. But he was not so excited over the adventure as was Putnuk. Ever since the Arctic sun had showed its red rim above the horizon, many sleeps gone, and had begun to melt the snow on the ice field, Putnuk had talked of nothing but the pursuit of wily *nanook*. Ood-le-uk could see him now in the sledge ahead, turning his face this way and that, looking for a great shaggy form upreared against the ice.

As the party topped a ridge, Ood-le-uk's eyes swept the beach line, where the shifting bergs ground against the eternal solidity of the land ice. Something he saw there made him check his team and stare. A black speck, two black specks, stood out distinctly against the gleaming white.

Instantly he guessed what it was. Driftwood, precious driftwood, from which so many valuable things could be made: new flooring for the home *innie,* a spear shaft, bowls, spoons, even a crudely cut doll for Baby A-vik.

While the boy sat, these thoughts passing through his mind, the other sledges glided on.

He saw them go, but he did not follow. He was figuring time and distance and speed. His dogs were fast. If he turned aside to the beach and collected the wood into piles, he could secure the treasure to himself, for driftwood belongs to the one who first finds it, and after it is neatly stacked, no Eskimo will disturb it. Doubtless Ood-le-uk thought he could still catch up with the hunters before they sighted the quarry.

He looked down the trail. The other sledges were still in view. Should he follow them or should he turn aside?

Suddenly the long whip cracked out in a stinging swirl above the dogs' backs. The decision had been made. Ood-le-uk was off to gather the driftwood.

As the team headed off at right angles from the direction they had been traveling, Ood-le-uk was nearly thrown from the sledge as it collided with an ice hummock. But he managed to hold on, the sledge righted itself, and on they went. But the way was rough. The old pack ice was formed in ridges and hollows, and this made going both slow and uncomfortable.

After about a half mile of hard traveling, the

team descended a steep incline to what appeared to be a smooth, frozen lake. Its shiny surface was mirrorlike, reflecting lofty crags and fantastic towers of ice. Ood-le-uk settled himself in the sledge and prepared to enjoy a bit of easy riding.

Suddenly he noticed that the speed of the dogs had increased. With backs held straight and apparently motionless, the huskies' legs flew in and out under them. There was no banner of plumed tails up, either; all tails were flattened out close under their stomachs. The dogs were frightened and were running for their lives.

Ood-le-uk glanced around. What was the cause of this? Then his eyes fell on the ice at the side, and a feeling of sickness rose up within him. The ice was moving in waves, rippling up and down like a caribou skin shaken in the hand.

Fear touched the boy's heart. This was thin ice, young ice, this surface of tempting smoothness. He had heard his father tell of its dangers. A moment's pause, and crash, through the treacherous crust one went.

He hardly dared breathe. There was no way to help himself. He had to trust to the speed and wisdom of Pedtgo to carry him to safety.

He glanced sideways at the ice again. Where the weight of the sledge pressed it down, it bulged up in another place. The undulating motion gave him the sensation of riding the waves of the sea in only the frame of an oomiak.

Ei! How the dogs were pulling! They knew their danger. Big Pedtgo was running as if the Wind Demon itself were behind him.

Slush-slush! The bone runners sank to half their depth. Ood-le-uk shut his eyes. The terror — he had not conquered it. Would he never, never see Mother Nup-su and merry little A-vik again?

With startling abruptness the sledge took an upward tilt. It had crashed through — it was going down — down —

Ood-le-uk opened his eyes. Then a delighted grin spread over his features. Safe — *eyi, eyi!* The dogs were climbing up a steep hummock of land ice. The thin lake ice was left behind. Good, wise old Pedtgo, to bring him across!

A short ride brought Ood-le-uk to the seashore. There he found the driftwood, many pieces of it, some small and broken, splintered by the grinding of the ice, but precious nevertheless;

some long and smooth, sticking up out of the floe.

As the boy gathered the wood and arranged it in neat piles, he heard the shouts of the hunters. Far away the cries were, and faint. Doubtless they had roused a bear. *Ei,* he would have to be joining them soon.

Some of the larger pieces of wood, however, were embedded in the ice, and he had to take his stone hatchet from his belt to dig them out.

Chip-chip, the ice flew in a shower around him. How deep down the timber went. What a fine, long piece to put in the floor of the *innie.*

He knew that he ought to hurry on to his duty. But somehow, as he thought of *nanook,* his hands worked slower and slower. It was pleasant, puttering around with bits of wood and dreaming of what he could make of them. But the very idea of a possible encounter with the brute his kinsmen sought turned his stomach hot and cold all at the same time.

"*Ey-yi-yi!*" That was Putnuk's voice. Had his father sent his cousin in search of him? Did they think him a baby likely to fall into every crevasse?

"*Ey-yi!*" Ood-le-uk let out a half-hearted yell in answer. The last bit of wood was on the pile. Now he would have to go back to the chase. His pleasure in his find was gone. He was ashamed that he had deserted. He realized now that fear, the horrible fear that moulded most of his actions, had sent him after the timbers to escape the struggle. He would have to hasten to rejoin the others and redeem himself.

Leaving the dog team on the beach, he began to climb up a high mound of pressure ice as confused shouts again reached his ears. From the summit he could doubtless locate his father and Putnuk and the rest.

Then, as he neared the top of the ridge, the shouts came clear, "Boy with the iron spear, hurl the weapon — the time now — "

It was the time — now!

Ood-le-uk rose over the ice and came face to face with the lank fury of a giant, gauntly hungry he-bear. The very quarry the hunters pursued!

For a dreadful moment they stood, the boy and the bear. The great beast seemed forever etched into Ood-le-uk's mind — small, snaky

head weaving back and forth; small, cruel eyes; huge talons of an upraised paw. So close was Ood-le-uk that he could see the saliva drip from bared, yellow fangs.

Ood-le-uk turned about and ran. It was death to run. The maddened ton of flesh could outrace him, would be upon him in a breath. A blow in the back must end him. The timid heart in his breast betrayed him, would not let him turn and fight for life as another hunter would have.

The hot breath of the lunging bear was on his neck. He tried to run faster, stumbled, fell. He fell sideways and momentum carried the bear past. With a marvel of muscular skill the great, ungainly mountain of flesh and fang whirled about.

It was the end — the beast was upon him!

A babel of sounds came to his ears, of voices and dogs. They were too late, could only see him die.

But he must die like a man, not shamefully, a fallen mass in the snow.

Somehow Ood-le-uk struggled up, faced about, one knee on a hummock, long spear clutched with the icy firmness of the death grip in his hands.

As the bear charged, the boy thrust forward with the weapon — forward and slantingly — with spear point at the monster's chest.

So he met the blow of the long claws that ripped his shoulder to the bone and cast him aside like a dried lichen blown by the wind. Dogs and voices sounded very close, then were blotted out into a black nothingness. It was death. Of that Ood-le-uk was very sure.

But it was not death, though Ood-le-uk had received a cruel, slashing wound that would be many sleeps in healing, that even after its healing would ache throbbingly in times of the bitterest cold.

When the blackness passed and Ood-le-uk opened his eyes, he was lying in a nest of the sledge furs. The bear was dead. In the nick of time had arrived other spear men and dogs. Before the great brute could give another, and the death blow, upon that undersized human that was in his path, the hunters had closed in. The chase had been ended in a dozen quick spear thrusts.

Already the men were skinning the beast. In the far north, bear pelt must be taken quickly before the carcass freezes.

As Ood-le-uk glanced about, Katok came and stood beside him. He laid close to his son's hand a long, metal-pointed spear. The weapon was freshly darkened with blood, the blood of the bear.

"A good thrust," muttered Katok. "To the left, and well put. Yours was the spear that found the heart," and the man's slant, black eyes gleamed with pride.

Ood-le-uk's own black eyes stared up amazedly at his father.

So he was not dead — he was alive! He had thrust the bear to the heart. His father was pleased with him. It was good. All was good, save the pain in his shoulder — and the pain in his heart that was fear. Though the danger was over, he still trembled. He shut his eyes quickly that the exulting Katok might not read the truth that lay in them. *Aneca!* Would he never conquer fear?

CHAPTER V

PRISONER OF THE ICE

SUMMER of a sort did eventually come to this polar land, a space of a few weeks thrust in between the biting cold of winters that fairly tripped upon each other's heels. Summer in Oodle-uk's land meant a melting somewhat of the ice in bays and inlets, meant even a few thawed, high spots of brown earth where the brave, stunted saxifrage and *irsuteet* lifted green heads for a little time. But eternal snow blanketed much of the land, and ice-that-never-melts still rode the waves of the big, open waters.

The Eskimos of the far north make the round of the seasons in a yearly program of hunts. Now was the time when the strongest hunters went out from Tekelerik village and lived for a space upon the floating sea ice. Equipped only with their weapons and their skin boats and provisioned with some meager lumps of frozen meat, these intrepid ones, for weeks at a time, never saw land.

By reason of his chieftainship, Katok was the head of all such expeditions. He was a chieftain after the only style Eskimos have any stomach for — a mighty hunter and a man of prowess. So it was Katok's skin canoe that led the little flotilla of one-man kayaks and an additional open oomiak or two out to a drifting camping ground on the sea. Here, on a great floe amid the trackless, shifting pack ice, was set up the central camp. The temporary huts were merely some rims of ice wall roofed with the skin boats. They were a hardy race, those Eskimos! There was work a-plenty. The green, summer waters between the ice lanes were as a vast storehouse from which this little Arctic tribe must draw out food for the coming winter. Tom-cod, spider crab, seal, and walrus — any and all meat was good to the Eskimo. Sometimes the campers hunted in a body. That was when the great, leathery, ton-heavy walrus must be brought to bay. For fishing and sealing, men often worked on the scattered floes and ice pans in threes, or twos even — such as Ituk and Ood-le-uk were doing on this day in late summer when a storm burst upon them.

No different in its beginning from many another summer storm was the wind flurry that swept Ood-le-uk and Ituk and their own particular lump of ice out of hailing distance of the other campers on the sea edge.

With a swift clap of thunder, a fall of big, soft snowflakes, then a piercing pelting of rain, the little tempest had burst upon them, interfering greatly with their stalking of a seal herd that sunned itself along the ice shelf. It was hard upon this so strangely assorted a pair of hunters to have their tedious work brought suddenly to naught. For an hour these two had been crawling on hands and knees, slowly inching forward toward their goal, the seal herd. The hunters themselves were concealed in sealskins and to the casual eye were merely another couple of sleek, black sea creatures shuffling along with the selfsame clumsy land gait of the squareflipper. As he moved, Ood-le-uk now and then slid a set of bear claws that he held in his hand over the ice, *scritch-scratch!,* very faintly. As old Ituk of the tattooed face inched himself forward inside his sealskin, he softly hummed strange words beneath his breath. These things, the scratching

and the song, were supposed to act as a charm upon the seals, to lull the silly round-headed creatures till man could slip into their midst. Curious to say, it was a charm that worked. Ituk and the trailing Ood-le-uk were almost within striking distance of their quarry when, with a rolling reverberation, burst that clap of thunder out of the summer sky. At the first crashing *a-boom-a,* every squareflipper lifted sleek head for a listening moment, then slid off the ice into the sea.

And the seal hunting was over for that day.

Old Ituk upreared himself angrily. Then his usual good-natured grin sent his tattoo marks into a weird design of smile wrinkles.

Aneca! No seals to-day — but there'd be other days, and other seals!

Hurrying along the floe edge in the teeth of the quickening wind, the old hunter pulled the skin canoe farther in on the ice and tied its thong securely about an ice knob. Then he and Ood-le-uk, with their sealskins flapping grotesquely, raced for the shelter of a crevice, to be out of the sleety rain. Their cave was a mere hollow that summer weather had wrought in one of the hill-like pressure ridges of their floating domain. To

make their retreat more snug, Ituk the Tattooed One cleverly held the edge of the wetted sealskins against the ice lintel of their cave doorway until it froze fast, and *illah,* he had a door curtain that kept out much wind! Then the Tattooed One lay flat on his back, folded his hands over his stomach, and thriftily went off to sleep. Simultaneous with Ituk's sleeping was his snoring. Ituk's snoring was fearsome. It began in a gurgling groan and ended in a snort like the bray of a bull caribou. It made Ood-le-uk think of dreadful things — of grinding ice floes, of men lost at sea, of evil spirits come down out of *Sermiksoak,* the place of the dead.

When Ood-le-uk could stand such thoughts no longer, he gently nudged an elbow into Ituk's ribs and began asking questions.

"Shall we drift far in such a storm, Tattooed One? Can ever we find again my father's camp upon the big drift?" The boy hoped his voice did not sound as quavery as he felt.

"Ugh, of course!" The sleepy Ituk answered both questions at once. "The wind may take us very far, but we have the boat, have we not? When the calm comes, we paddle back to the other ice,

or to the land, perhaps. It is very simple. Because you are young, your brain is small and rattles much in your head. It is better to lay your hands upon your stomach and sleep, thus." And Ituk's marvelous, gurgling bray of a snore filled the ice cave once more.

Ood-le-uk obediently folded his hands, but sleep would not come. Instead came many thoughts.

Meantime the storm swept on into a crescendo of fury with no sign of abatement. A mad wind howled past the ice-crack cave, and even the vast solidity of the floe rocked and trembled to the surge of the storm-lashed waves.

For a second time, Ood-le-uk nudged an elbow into the ribs of the snoring Ituk. It was a swift, sharp movement that turned the caribou bray into a snort.

"*Auf — aoi!* You be troublesome, like a fishbone that pricks the throat."

"We have no food," said the boy. "In a storm that holds for long, how do men eat?"

"When one has naught to eat, it is better to sleep," said the old one testily.

Outside the storm roared and pounded. Now

and again came thunderous detonations that were not sky thunders at all, but the crash of icebergs split asunder.

In reality Ituk had his fears — fears for companions, for boats, for perils of the pack ice. But he made no sign of this. He merely lay still; only, after a while, he said softly, "Son of Katok, if you be cold, come close to me. Two can lie more warmly than one."

Up under the lee of Ituk's befurred back Oodle-uk dropped off to sleep. Fear cannot keep one awake forever.

Many hours later he awoke with a feeling of vacantness about him. He rolled from side to side and flung out his arms. He touched nothing warm and human, merely the walls of the cave. He leaped up and thrust himself out from behind the sealskin door robe into the open. But outside there was no sign of old Ituk the Tattooed One.

It was a world of dazzling blue-and-white calm that he blinked out upon, a world changed in many ways. The iceberg he drifted upon was smaller. Pound of wind and water had beaten off all save the tough, mountainous heart of the floe.

The shelving edges, the thong-bound ice knob, the canoe — all were gone, even as Ituk was gone.

In the stormy darkness the old hunter must have crept out of the shelter to see after the safety of their little, walrus-hide boat. He and that portion of the ice floe, boat and all, must have cracked off and gone adrift into another part of the sea. Either that or the Tattooed One had gone to his death, swept in the storm wash and crushed between the thundering floes. There was no thought in the boy's heart that Ituk the Tattooed might have stolen away in the boat for his own safety. For Ituk could no more have done that than Ood-le-uk could have thought it of him. Such little things are not in the simple, courageous code of the little, brown men of the north.

All day Ood-le-uk tried to make himself believe that somewhere, on a far-distant ice pan, old Ituk was launching a skin canoe and coming in search of him. Or that, perhaps, from some still more distant ice pack the boats of Katok, his father, were out combing the waters for the lost ones.

Very likely, some one of these things was going on. But the chances of any rescue coming to Oodle-uk dwindled with every passing hour. Somewhere, below the southern horizon, another storm brewed and burst blackly over the waters. Lash of wind and wave rolling up from the south swept the castaway on his ice raft farther and farther into the Arctic north.

CHAPTER VI

LAND TO THE NORTH

ASIN! ASIN! (Get up! Get up!)" Ood-le-uk rolled over weakly and opened his eyes. He thought he heard Mother Nup-su calling, thought he was back in the warm home *innie,* sleeping under the great, caribou robe in the deep bed of furs laid flat on the floor.

But it was only a dream. As his eyes cleared of sleep, they stared up in fear at the uneven, rocky roof over his head. A mingled heap of stones and broken masses of ice barricaded the entrance to this land cave where lay the boy huddled back under a couple of tattered sealskins.

A sob rose in Ood-le-uk's throat and came near to choking him. He was utterly alone. He had traveled many days' journey into the far North, and he knew not where he was. Fear shook him like an ague, and he drew the sealskins up over his head in an attempt to shut out the memory of many things.

It was a miracle that Ood-le-uk had ever lived to touch foot upon land again. For many sleeps he had been adrift upon the ice, for so long that he had lost all count of time. Storm had succeeded storm, each tempest driving him onward, out and out from the shelter of the long arm of Onzebue Sound and into the cold reaches of the northern ocean. There, strange currents tugged and swirled at his vast ice raft, thrusting it on toward the polar lights.

Fearsome company sometimes rode with him. Once a great, white bear hove himself up out of the sea water and scrambled aboard Ood-le-uk's mighty berg of the tall ice towers. Luckily for Ood-le-uk, the shaggy monarch of the floes did not tarry long. Other business in the wind soon called him elsewhere. But for a space he sat on his haunches, muzzle in the air, and his head slowly weaving from side to side after the fashion of his kind. He was scenting meat. Hiding back among the ice crags, the Eskimo boy had felt his bones turn to water in his terror as he watched. Weakened from hunger and exhaustion, he could fall easy prey to this monster. But borne down on the wind, news of juicier, sweeter

meat twitched at the great white beast's black double-button of a nose. Young walrus or seal it must have been, on another piece of drift. Answering the call of the wind, the bear lumbered down on all fours and took his huge bulk back to water.

At first the boy, in brief calms between driving tempests, had managed to spear a few fish through holes in the drifting ice floe. Then had come a time when there had been no luck. With no food he had grown steadily weaker under the bite of the cold until it seemed that the end was not far off. But days later a small seal had washed aboard the shelving edge of Ood-le-uk's rolling, lurching craft. When the wave wash that had brought it receded, the stunned animal was left behind, held by some mere chance against the roughness of the ice.

Meat brought back life to Ood-le-uk — and some of his lost courage.

Before the carcass of the seal was entirely picked clean, new winds took the ice raft under headway and swept it out of the pull of the northward current. Then the wind died down and the suck of the in-tides grounded the berg upon a

northern land that projected far out into the ocean. And Ood-le-uk went ashore into a wild, new land, hundreds of miles farther north than his own strip of the Arctic.

At first the excitement of the feel of solid earth beneath the foot had filled the mind of the small, storm-tossed wanderer — that and the business of finding a stone hollow high up in the midst of rocky boulders and barricading himself in against the attack of prowling wild animals.

A sleep ago the narrow cave had seemed a blessed retreat, a haven for weary bones to crawl into. To-day its loneliness mocked the boy. He lay with the salt-stiffened sealskins pulled up over his eyes, and terror of the silences swept like a flood over his brain. Far away down another coast line, life in the snug, little village of Tekelerik by the Sea was going on without him. Doubtless his mother, Nup-su, of the round, smiling face, would darken her features with soot of seal oil in mourning for her lost son. Katok, too, would doubtless search the ice from every headland and cove, seeking him whom the ice had taken. Then after a space, affairs would roll on as they always had — the hunting, the feasting, the story-

telling at nights, all the pleasant communal existence of the Eskimo. A tribal life of which he was no longer a part!

The boy rolled over on his face and beat his hands upon the earth. The longing for home and for humankind was a madness that must have touched his brain had not hunger finally driven him forth from his cave.

A small, shrinking figure in ragged, wolfskin garments was Ood-le-uk as he crept out to a cliff peak and gazed about him. On one side stretched the ocean, limitless miles of water and drift ice. On the other side lay the land, a far, flat country that seemed to stretch emptily into the nowhere. But as Ood-le-uk came down from the heights into the low country, his keen eyes told him that this seeming emptiness held much of life — animal life. There on the vast, snow level, as on an open page, was recorded for him who could read it a record of many comings and goings: spreading, cup-shaped print of caribou hoof; round pad of bear where the mighty one of the north had marched down to the floe for seal; farther on were crisscrossing trails of lesser game, lemming, marmot, and loitering white fox. Back out on

the cliffs sounded the whir and squawk of sea birds. A few hardy feathered ones were left, though the late summer migration was already on. From afar up the coast came the booming bellow of a walrus herd. Behind that bellow was much meat and great leathery hides and the bone one needed for every purpose. But Ood-le-uk turned a deaf ear to the throaty rumble of those northern monsters. Seasoned hunters of strength and cunning were needed to cope with the mammoth strength of tusked I-wak, the walrus. He, Ood-le-uk, must fill his stomach with lesser game.

All that remained to Ood-le-uk of his old life was the little handful of equipment that had been carried with him to that disastrous seal hunt with Ituk on the ice floes — two knives, his tall, iron-pointed spear, a piece of flint, a handful of moss for lighting fires, some sinew cord, and a fish-hook of bone. With the exception of the garments he wore, the strange, wooden charm locket on its cord about his neck, and the spear in his hand, the son of Katok could carry all his worldly possessions in his sealskin *pooksak* that he wore strapped to his person.

With such equipment as he had, the Eskimo

stripling set about wrestling his living from the snowy land. Along the runs where rabbit dung was, he set up little snares of bone and sinew. With spear or throw-stick he sometimes brought down a bird. Without a dog, keen of nose to trail down the scent, seal hunting on the ice was next to impossible. Twice, though, the boy had the luck to stumble by sheerest accident against the rounded mound of snow and ice that was a seal's breathing hole. And at one hole, a day's patient waiting, with spear poised ready, rewarded him with a fat seal. This rich meat was a welcome change of diet. But better than the meat, for the purpose Ood-le-uk had in mind, were the sinews, the skin, the bony carcass. Out of this material the boy fashioned himself a pair of snowshoes.

With this aid to travel and while the late-summer daylight still held, he began making as long journeys inland as he dared. In Ood-le-uk's soul raged one consuming desire — the longing to set foot again in his own land, among his own people. With no chance of possessing sledge and dogs himself, his idea was to locate some Eskimo tribe that owned these necessary adjuncts of travel. Perhaps in such company he could some

day come within range of his own little tribe's far-reaching hunting ground.

Ood-le-uk was hopeful that he might be near the camp of some Eskimo tribe of the land above the Nunatok River. From thence in some years stunted, brown men of the farthest North had come shyly down to the sea edge of Onzebue Sound to trade strangely big pieces of ivory for the bird-skin *kapetahs* or covers and the fur garments, trimmed in beads of cut bone, that the dwellers of the Sound made so well.

But though Ood-le-uk traveled in all directions as far as possible from his little base of supplies, he found no sign of man at all in these far northern reaches — no stacked driftwood, no stone pile where the hand of man had built a dwelling, no snow-covered midden of bone refuse. Nothing . . . He was alone!

With only this bitter knowledge to think upon, Ood-le-uk had to set about making his own rude dwelling as comfortable as he might for the winter. For winter was coming fast upon him now.

Somewhere to the north of him, he could still at times hear the rumbling and grumbling of

the walrus herd borne to his ears down the wind. And when he heard, a passion of desire shook him. If he did but possess one of those great, thick walrus hides, leather vastly tough and heavy, he stood some chance of getting back to the land of his tribespeople. One could contrive many things of walrus leather.

But mere thought of combat with one of these sleek, swollen, glossy-sided monsters made the stripling youth swallow a great lump of fear in his throat and tremble within his ragged furs. A bull walrus weighed more than fifty Ood-le-uks. Of what avail was Ood-le-uk's spear against the tusked I-wak's hugeness?

So the boy put all thought of walrus hide behind him and turned his full attention to the hunting and trapping of what smaller game he might see. Their meat and fur were needed to make the coming winter endurable.

Down in his home village among those Arctic tribes of the Onzebue, hunters brought in the game, and their women prepared meat and furs into the necessary comforts. But here in his far-northern wilds, Ood-le-uk had to do both man's and woman's work.

The hunting and trapping came to him naturally. His father, Katok, had taught him of these things from his earliest remembrance. The boy had learned to make sinew snares before, or almost as soon as, he could walk. The proper angle to hold the fish spear, or again the angle of the seal spear, had been drilled into his head when he was about six.

But with woman's work it was different. Many a time the boy wrinkled his brow beneath its thatch of black hair into deep thought wrinkles as he strove to remember just how the bone needle of Nup-su, his mother, slipped so easily through folds of thick, furred hide. For that matter, he had to begin back at the beginning and work out for himself how Nup-su made her very needles and punch-awls of sharpened bone, from what sort of sinew she stripped the long, tough lengths of thread with which she sewed.

Because he was quick of finger and blessed with a mechanical turn of mind, the boy really did achieve a very creditable output of house furnishings. Some of his possessions were crudely and crookedly made, but at least they were strong. His cave shelter behind its rampart of rocks, he had

with much labor, and with some pieces of sharpened rocks as his only tools, managed to widen and deepen into a more roomy housing space. On either side of the entrance he built up piles of stones and ice, plastered without in a banking of snow. These piles narrowed his doorway till he could comfortably close it with a sizable boulder.

In imitation of the snugness of his far-away home *innie,* over the floor of his cave he stretched a carpet of sewed furs, pulled taut across an under packing of snow moss. His bed was this carpet and his cover the bundle of furs piled in one corner. Set upon a strip of slate in another corner was a crude lamp made of a patiently hollowed piece of potstone. In it flickered a wick made of a roll of twisted moss stuck in a lump of fat.

Ood-le-uk had made himself comfortable for the winter. It was comfort that must go on through the many winters of a long loneliness until Death, the Great Spirit of the North that walks quietly and is never far off, should take to itself all that was mortal of Ood-le-uk the Eskimo.

Perhaps it was some such thought as this that

drove Ood-le-uk into his madness. For it was nothing short of madness which moved him to attempt that which he now set out to do.

From some ice field, driven by the wind down nearer to his cave, came the challenge of a deep, hoarse, booming roar.

With a strange, set look on his young face, Ood-le-uk chose his best spear, thrust a heavy-bladed, flint knife into his belt, and went out to meet that hoarse, bellowed roar. It was future hope, or sudden death, that he was going out to meet. Either for life or for death, it would be quickly over. That it would be quickly over was good. He could stand no more of this corroding, hopeless loneliness that was eating into his soul.

The way Ood-le-uk went was toilsome. It was along the shore line where in endless succession ice fields, driven by wind or tide, had met and, under tremendous pressure, had thrust up ridges of tumbled blocks and broken parapets. After an hour of this hard going, he rounded a spur of ice and suddenly flung himself down in a flattened huddle. As he looked, he drew a long and difficult breath. Not far from the sea water and in the lee of a great rock rising blackly out of

the ice, a herd of walrus lay basking in the sun — huge, sleek, shining sea gluttons, ranging in size anywhere from a ton to two tons of massed flesh apiece. The bull nearest the land lifted his great, whiskered head. His long, down-thrust tusks gleamed cruelly. Wet, red jaws hung open. Bulging eyes set under the bristling rolls of head flesh searched the floe cunningly. I-wak the walrus was a fearsome creature. Woe to that which stood between him and the place he would go! For all his bulk, I-wak could move with the slashing speed of sea ice driven before the wind.

The boy, flat behind his sheltering ledge, gulped, and his stomach went sick. For to succeed in his wild project he must come between the bull walrus and his path to the sea. It was the only way.

Before his heart could entirely turn to water, Ood-le-uk moved back up out of the gap and began strange operations. With his knife he carefully chipped and loosened a block of ice. Then, flat on his stomach and pushing this screen before him, he began maneuvering slowly forward. It was touchy business — a few inches move, then a long, breathless wait while he made sure that

the herd saw nothing beyond the ordinary in their usual outlook of ice. It was a chilly progress and heartbreakingly slow. Once a distraction down on the ice rim gave him a chance to wriggle forward many yards at top speed. A young bull surging up from the sea bottom, its heavy jaws grotesquely fringed with a protruding frazzle of seaweed and dangling mollusks upon which it had been feeding, moved up the landward too near the resting place of the lord of the herd. With a senseless bellow, the monster bore down upon the luckless one and with furious downward slashings ripped him open in half-a-dozen streaming wounds. The wounded one slithered off ice into water, probably to die, for the sea edge crimsoned in a deal of blood.

Prickles of dread ran through the roots of Ood-le-uk's black hair. He halted for a space. But after a long uncertainty, he began to push on swiftly. When there was not more than fifty feet between him and the herd, Ood-le-uk suddenly rose up, slanted his spear, and charged straight at the great brute of the bloodstained tusks. Now he had leaped upon the rock. The bull raised his ugly head, bellowed a mad challenge, and lunged with a thrust of bladed tusks that would have

Ood-le-uk suddenly rose up, slanted his spear, and charged.

ripped the hunter asunder had he not dodged.

About the battle rock surged a mêlée of huge, smooth bodies, walrus cows lurching toward the green of the water.

As Ood-le-uk dodged, his foot turned, and he staggered. The bull was upon him; one of the boy's legs was slashed open in red-hot pain. But the hunter's spear had been thrust. Twice and thrice it pierced walrus hide. The third thrust found the heart.

It took Ood-le-uk many hours to follow back the trail through the everlasting pressure ridges that barred the way to his cave. He was ill with weakness and pains in his wounded limb, and still he persisted in dragging after him at the end of a thong a great bundle of walrus-hide strips. The hoard of fat meat he had had, grudgingly, to leave behind, a feast, without doubt, for wandering he-bear and wolf and the numberless white foxes. The bony carcass he could go back for later. He would have much use for it. But the bundle of vastly thick, leathery hide, all that he could lug after him, was the precious thing, to be taken home at any costs. Bound up in that bundle were his hopes.

CHAPTER VII

WINTER

FOR many sleeps after the walrus hunt Ood-le-uk was very ill. The long slash of the tusk wound in his leg became a festering sore, and his limb swelled alarmingly. The fever pains mounted and ran through his body till he became obsessed with the belief that an evil spirt dwelled in his stomach. To kill the evil within him, he lay on his face and rolled and tossed, but the spirit was hard to kill. Illness possessed him. Luckily he had some small provisions of meat stored at the back of his cave. In lucid spells he ate sufficient to keep his soul within his body.

Then gradually the wound healed, and he was able to be up and about once more — a thin, wan Ood-le-uk, rather pale in the brown of his young face. He had paid a dear price for those strips of walrus hide drawn home at the end of a thong.

And now the winter night descended — a mystic, strange period, lighted by the moon and

the violet and purple streamers of the aurora. The sun was gone. Five moons must pass before its red disk would rise again through the Arctic haze. Gray light, far-flung howl of the wolf pack, utter loneliness — yet it was not a miserable loneliness that now enveloped Ood-le-uk. A light seemed to burn within the boy, to irradiate his face. The light was hope. Out of his first black despair had been born a plan.

Piece by piece he had lugged home portions of bone from the walrus carcass. This in itself had been no easy task. For fear of attack by white bear or wolf, he had traveled with the load thong bound across his brow and carried his iron-pointed spear ready to hand. Burden bearing was, with some slight exception, rather a new work for Ood-le-uk. For in his homeland, as a general thing, it was the women who cheerfully drew home the loads, while their men marched with hands free to swing knife or spear and bodies unencumbered so they could swiftly hurl themselves in the face of danger and protect their families.

When not tending his snares set to catch his necessary meat, the boy toiled incessantly by the

light of his lamp. Pieces of walrus bone and walrus thong strewed his cave. With these he was working out his great plan. Not always, though, were his hands busy with this curious framework of walrus bones all neatly dovetailed together and lashed with sinew.

Sometimes his fingers were gripped tightly about a sliver of flint that he used as a cutting implement to carve a design upon a piece of queer, green-tinged ivory. It was a slab of walrus ivory that he had found buried beneath one of the stones that he had rolled up to strengthen his cave entrance. Its tint was a beautiful sea-green laid on in waving bands of color of varying depth. From a long burial in the earth, the walrus tusk must have absorbed its color out of some mineral matter. The design which he painstakingly scratched upon the green ivory was, in a way, a record of his wanderings. Some sharply pointed lines represented the pinnacled iceberg upon which he had been rafted north. Here was scratched in crude, bold outlines, the fierce mask of a polar bear; I-wak, the bull walrus, by his rock; the pair of snowshoes that went on a fruitless journey; the cave; the lamp with its flame.

Or again through the many months of the gray and purple of the winter night, Ood-le-uk bent his energies to the shaping and grinding of the end of a narwhal tusk into a neatly barbed spearhead. Now that he was fired by hopes of seeing his homeland once more, he had it in his heart to take these things, the carving and the spear, as gifts to his mother and Katok, his father. There were other things his fingers contrived, too: bits of ivory carved into spoons, a doll, a cup, a necklace of walrus teeth pierced by the point of his hand drill and strung on a sinew cord, some ermine skins well cured and suitable for boot-top trimming. These were gifts for his sisters and little brothers and A-vik, the round, brown baby who was still being carried in Mother Nup-su's hood when the ice had taken him adrift. Doubtless the plump A-vik was now crawling over the family fur mat on her own sturdy arms and legs. It was for A-vik that he had carved the queer doll with its features made up of three horizontal slits for eyes and mouth, and one perpendicular slit set in for a nose, and a bit of soot rubbed in to make the lines stand out clearly.

Ood-le-uk's main winter work was the curious bone framework he was patiently shaping and binding together. When at last the first light days of spring began to come, he carried the various portions of this stoutly thong-knotted contraption out into the open and began to assemble them.

At first the springtime sun had stayed above the horizon but a moment, a blood-red rim that almost immediately sank out of sight. According to Ood-le-uk's belief, Unorri, the North Wind, had quickly blown the sun back down into the jaws of Winter. But day by day, the sun hung longer in the sky. This dawn of a new spring found the Ood-le-uk of the lonely northern cave hut far different from the timid Ood-le-uk of the home village. He still had fears, but at least he had forced himself to conquer fear many times, and that in itself gave him strength. He was now stockier, heavier. A mature air sat upon his young face. He was immeasurably older, a man grown, in fact. Though by the record of his own particular "bone bag" hung back in the home *innie,* he had just turned "sixteen bones old" with the coming of this year's sun. The bone bag was a neat little method the Eskimo had evolved for keep-

ing track of time. When a child was born, a small bag of skin was hung upon the hut wall. For every yearly round of the sun, a bone was dropped in the bag. When a child was ten years old, the ten bones were tied into a bundle and a new set of ten was begun.

All through the winter, Ood-le-uk had at intervals worked upon his strips of precious walrus hide. He had racked his brain to remember all the hide-tanning lore of Nup-su. According to his best remembrance of the age-old ritual of the coast Eskimo, he had scraped and rubbed and chewed those strips of hide into a thick leather that was wonderfully pliable. Some pieces he had sewed together in amazingly tight seams. He now began to set other seams, fitting the whole in a shaped cover to the long, narrow frame he had made.

At last it was done! All through the winter it had grown under his hands — his boat, his way out of this exile!

He had toiled over it with the inborn wisdom of the coast Eskimo. He had nothing to go by save the memory of the sea-going kayaks of his people. In the making he drew for himself no de-

sign by which to work. He merely knew for a certainty by the feel of the thing to his hand whether he was building rightly or wrongly. The curving ribs from the walrus skeleton ribbed his boat nicely. A knife was his only tool. The slim frame was held together wholly with lashings of sinews and leather thongs. But with its cunningly set braces and well-knotted cording, it was very strong. The finishing touch was the fitting on of the scraped walrus-hide cover. Ood-le-uk's boat followed the classic Eskimo outline — slim bow, slim stern, a cockpit set between water-tight compartments fore and aft. Already, months back in the lamp-lit winter night, he had fashioned two other pieces of equipment needed to go with the boat — a double-bladed paddle of bone and a waterproof outer garment patiently sewed together out of the narrow transparent strips of seal intestines.

As day by day the sun rode higher, Ood-le-uk studied the sky and longed for open water. Like all Arctic dwellers, Ood-le-uk knew how to use the sky as his map, his chart by which to plot a course. In the grayish mirror of the heavens were accurately reflected water and ice condi-

tions. On many a hunt back in the life of Onzebue Sound, the boy had watched Katok consult the gray, curving vault of the sky and then, by this alone, lay a course over pack ice direct to open pools that were probably seal haunts. It was very simple when one knew what one was about. Blue spots on the face of the sky meant open water directly underneath. Even out on a rough sea pack, in the midst of sixty- and seventy-foot ramps of pressure ridges where one could not sight straight ahead over the ice surface for a furlong in any direction, old Katok had been well used to picking out on the sky map some pool miles away and then by mere continued references to the overhead chart, making his way to it by a direct route. The nearer he approached the pool he was seeking, the higher over his head mounted the sky reflection of water.

But Ood-le-uk was not scanning the heavens for any mirroring of mere pools. What he needed to find now were vast, blue stretches, indicating open sea water below, open sea water along the shore line. The ice pack continued interminably, though, and the sky map rewarded his gaze with a dull, gray solidity. Because he was very far

north, the spring break-up came later than he had ever known it.

Then with the suddenness of things Arctic, a warm gale blew across the land. The ice pack broke and went pounding out to sea. There other winds and the tide nearing its in-flood met it and hurled it back landward. For the boy watcher on his lonely headland was spread a titanic spectacle. The polar sea lay as a vast water expanse filled with broken floes of every size and shape. Great boulders of ice, sixty feet thick and blind white, swept landward under pressure of wind and a hundred miles of pack ice behind them. Into the breaking shore ice these besiegers swept with terrific grinding and crashing. Floe ground upon mighty floe, and under the impact broken ice shot high in the air. It was fearsome, a world in uproar, a world of ice rumbling, cracking, booming.

Many sleeps later, the sky map held for Ood-le-uk the promise he sought. Where a fortnight ago it had been dull gray and seven sleeps ago had been crossed in lanes and pools of blue, it now held mirrored the big, wide blue of open sea water.

The great day had come. With his heart near

For the boy watcher on his lonely headland was spread a titanic spectacle.

bursting for happiness, the boy carried his boat down to the shore and slid it into the ocean. It rode the heaving stretches firm and true, even as it had breasted the water of little pools in its try-outs. Behind him lay the yawning emptiness of the cave where he had lived for a winter. In spite of his happiness, he had felt something like a pang at crossing its threshold for the last time. Under its shelter he had suffered much, but here he had learned much also. And now he was leaving it behind, and with it a phase of his life.

Excitement soon swept all other feeling from the boy's being. He swung his double-bladed paddle man-fashion. Before him lay home. And in a boat of his own making, he was carrying to his people gifts.

By degrees, the boy in the skin canoe moved southward, threading ice lanes, hugging the coast, working his way down the shore line with the rising sun always on his left. A brave, tragic young figure with some dried meat, a sealskin water bag and a charm piece in a wooden locket to stand between him and disaster!

CHAPTER VIII

GIFT OF THE SEA

WHILE the calm held, Ood-le-uk made his progress with land always in sight. He slept at night under the shelter of his kayak drawn ashore and propped sidewise on some stone or ice block. By day he paddled along the water edge of the Northland that was just beginning to yield itself to the touch of summer. Under the south wind, rock ribs, black and shiny, melted off their snow caps and showed up darkly against the white. With the south wind there swept up into the Arctic the first feathered voyagers — the eagles, the snow birds, the big geese, the wedges of ducks. The air above sometimes resounded with weird laughter, call of the loons flying north with a host of other water birds.

But one night the south wind changed. It rolled up sullen and swift. It swept the sea birds from their course and far out into the air currents above ocean stretches. It swept the infinitesimal

human dot of Ood-le-uk in his skin canoe far from land and out in the ocean wastes. This was for the better in a way, for the storms that swept in the south wind's wake would soon have battered the bone-and-hide kayak to bits in the wave wash against shore rocks. But even so, the storm wrought disaster enough. Lashing waves smashed across the skin canoe and snatched the brown boy's paddle from his very hands. He was swept helplessly astray out on a wild and terrible ocean.

For days and nights the little boat drifted aimlessly on, a plaything of the currents. Food gave out. Water gave out. There was left in Ood-le-uk's pack only the small gifts of carvings and furs that he was taking to his people. In the end these came to be a valueless weight on his back. One cannot eat green ivory bearing pictures cut in a fine flourish or a neatly carved spoon with a seal head on the handle. As the hunger sickness gripped the boy, he would have fallen into the sea had not a stout thong bound the bottom edge of his transparent, waterproof shirt firmly about the round rim of the kayak's cockpit in which he sat. It was the usual Eskimo method of shedding

the wave wash off both boat and boatman. It now at least kept Ood-le-uk out of the sea. As unconsciousness swept over him, he fell forward weakly across the front of his craft, arms outflung, head rolling to the motion of every wave. For long before his collapse he had lost all sense of direction. Storm-tossed in the open sea, he had no means of knowing that instead of drifting southward, new currents were driving him elsewhere. West and westward, following the red path of the setting sun, went the kayak, until some vagary of the currents swept it into a small, smooth bay guarded by the mighty headland of East Cape. Here fur-clad men paddled about in open skin boats, and back on the shore were set the strange, pointed-top huts of the natives of Siberia.

The half-dead little huddle of skins and furs that was Ood-le-uk was sighted in the drifting kayak by sharp eyes. Strong hands lifted him into a bidar, or Siberian open boat, and carried him in to the village of Igirka. Here was the home of a little tribe of Costal Tschuktschi. These fisher folk, along with their kindred tribes, the Nomad or Reindeer Tschuktschi, made up that hardy race which occupied the bleak, north-

eastern stretches of Asia. A wild, fierce people were the Tschuktschi, yet with all their savagery, they had borrowed a few points of civilization from the Russians that already for a hundred years or so had been sweeping onward across North Asia. But their civilization was mostly outward, consisting largely of a fondness for glass beads and iron kettles and brick tea and some other such commodities for which the nomadic native traders bartered furs at the great Russian yearly fair held at Ostrownoje in the Siberian Arctic.

To the superstitious villagers of Igirka, this drifting in of a strangely dressed human in an entirely unknown type of boat, smacked strongly of things mysterious and demoniac. To old Ir-Kaij, the village *shaman,* or witch doctor, the coming of the stranger was as a gift of the sea spirits to be utilized in a religious rite soon to be celebrated.

The Tschuktschi tribesmen of the Arctic North knelt to weird combination of devil worship and Christianity. For many of them had, even thus early, been converted to Christianity and baptized by the valiant Russian missionaries

who had already penetrated the frozen steppes of North Asia. But even these seemingly converted ones still held a healthy fear of the *shaman*. The missionary they saw once every four or five years, or perhaps once in a lifetime. The medicine man was with them always. And always, to heighten his own power, the medicine man was fanning their superstitions to fever heat. For a hundred generations before the coming of Christianity, the wild cult of Schamanism had been the accepted religion throughout the deserts of Northern Siberia. Without doubt many priests of the cult believed firmly in their own spiritual powers. They were born into the midst of a general belief in ghosts, *shamans,* and the power exercised by the latter — a power that could command human sacrifices in extreme cases.

Such a priest-*shaman* was old Ir-Kaij of the village of Igirka. His little band of tribespeople had fallen into sad days these latter years. Once this tribe had been rich Nomads or Reindeer Tschuktschi, living well on the produce of their herds. But many among them lost their herds by that fearful, sweeping reindeer sickness, the *rinderpest,* and became paupers in a night. These

settled along the coast and taking up a new mode of life, had to eke out a precarious existence by hunting and fishing. From the Onkilon, the flat-faced, native sea people, these Tschuktschi gradually had acquired dogs for sledge drawing and for hunting. From the Onkilon, too, they had learned something of the despised arts of fishing and seal snaring and hunting the wolf and the bear and the fox. But it was a life that sat poorly upon the Tschuktschi. They longed for the free, open days of the reindeer ranges. Poverty-stricken as they were now, still other disaster seemed highly imminent. From afar off there drifted in the report that a sickness was killing off the draught dogs of many settlements. To protect his own people from this further dire affliction, the *shaman* of Igirka had but recently departed to a desert place to fast and plan such magnificent conjurations as would appease the incensed spirits and cause them to turn their malignant curse from the sledge animals of his tribespeople.

To this wild-eyed, streaming-haired old Ir-Kaij, who had just returned from this period of starvation and apparition-haunted trances, the

timely arrival of the strange youth in the strange boat seemed indeed some dispensation of the spirit gods he had so fervently invoked.

With a commanding gesture, the *shaman* had ordered this human gift of the sea to be carried to the hut of Valetka, the *Kamakai* (chief of the village), and cared for properly until such time as the spirits demanded use of this gift.

Valetka was away on a hunt and food was none too plentiful, but nevertheless Ir-Kaij was not one to be disobeyed.

When Ood-le-uk came to his senses, he was lying on soft, skin robes and over him stretched the leather roof and leather side pieces of a hut upheld by wooden poles. Out of weakness he lay inert, but his black eyes darted everywhere. The walls were hung with a surprising variety of things, javelins, leather cuirasses, wide thongs of walrus skin, some small sledges of a strange pattern, harness, fishing implements. Excitement tingled through every part of his being. He closed his eyes tightly as if to exorcise some dream hallucination, then opened them wide again. Yes, they were still in place — the walls, the roof, the

many man-made implements! Sounds drifted in from beyond the walls of this inner apartment, voices, pound of a pestle stone, footsteps. Such a joyful trembling seized him that he shook as with an ague. It was good beyond belief — after the long loneliness — to be back in the midst of humankind again. Then his weakness overpowered him, and he dropped back into the half-fainting coma of his starvation.

When Ood-le-uk next knew anything, a sinewy, brown hand had jerked him up to a sitting position and some one was pouring warm meat broth out of a horn cup down his throat, to a gabble of unpleasant muttering in an unknown tongue. His quick brain sensed something of the meaning, if not the words of the woman's, "Ya . . . Stupid One, open your mouth . . . To think that this weak-kneed stranger is thrust off on me to nourish, when food is scarce for even my own children! Kai!" And the meal and the tirade ended simultaneously with the last upward tipping of the drained horn vessel.

The dispenser of broth was Lalaj, wife of Valetka the *Kamakai,* to whom had been delegated by the *shaman* the task of feeding the

stranger, a task which interrupted Lalaj's exceedingly necessary pounding of dried fish and left her slightly surly. With hard times upon her, yet must she cease her preparations of food to be stored for the winter, must divide her scant supplies with this unknown being, that for all she knew might be a ghost or a devil himself!

Deep worry puckered the woman's usually pleasant, round face, with the bright, slant eyes, black and shiny as a seal's back. To the housewife's flowing *kamlaja,* or garment of dyed reindeer skin, clung a sturdy, copper-colored toddler, who with gurgles of delight fell upon Ood-le-uk's open back pack and drew out of it the handsome bit of green ivory. Ood-le-uk fiercely snatched away his treasure from those greedy, clutching little fingers; the spoiled youngster screeched and howled; and Lalaj suddenly ended the mêlée by exasperatedly seizing upon Ood-le-uk's carved piece and giving it to her child.

Ood-le-uk fell back panting weakly. Despite himself, tears stung his eyelids. It was his record piece. Upon the green ivory were cut some of the great events of his life. And now it was gone.

His idiotic tears, as much as his loss, angered him. He felt suddenly bereft of his hard-won manhood. With a quick movement, he thrust his hand against his chest to see if his wooden amulet still lay beneath his garment. At least that was left to him in the midst of distress and weakness.

The next day when a thumping of pestle against mortar stone told that the woman of the lodge was busy in the outer apartment, a slender Tschuktschi youth, dressed in the tattered remnant of what had once been a handsome, long, leather coat ornamented in bands of tarnished, gold-thread embroidery, came to Ood-le-uk's pallet and shyly gave him back his ivory piece, signing that the child had wearied of it and dropped it. He, himself, would know more of it.

With the comforting feel of his carving back again to hand, Ood-le-uk, in a sort of pantomime, with much glistening of teeth and waving of arms, acted out certain episodes recorded on the green ivory — how he lived alone in a cave, killed the walrus, made a boat of the hide. In return, his new friend, Etel, son of Valetka, showed him his treasures, a fish net of woven willow rods, a knife

all of polished metal, a wooden dog sledge, some thongs weighted in walrus teeth that he indicated was a fowling contrivance.

Every day Etel made some opportunity for a visit with the hunger-weakened stranger boy. By means of signs and a few words of a jargon concocted out of two languages, they could carry on exciting conversations that were mostly wavings of arms and pointings and gesticulations.

Then came a time when Ood-le-uk had another visitor. A wild-looking man with many fur tails dangling about his headpiece and a skin drum swung on his back came to sit in Valetka's hut. For a while he sat in silence beside the fire of bones soaked in train oil that burned sputteringly on the hearthstones beneath the smoke hole set in the pointed roof. As silently, he partook of the food the housewife, with a great deal of ceremony and considerable trembling, placed before him. Then this gaunt man in ragged furs turned his bloodshot eyes with their fierce mystic gaze upon Ood-le-uk as he lay on the pallet. To the boy there was an awful power in those eyes. They seemed to tear the heart out of his body with their fierceness. Before the silent visitor left, he picked

a piece of charred bone out of the fire and with it drew a sign on the hut wall — a circle and a half-circle beside it. Then he passed his hand across his throat, as one would pass a knife across a throat, looked at Ood-le-uk again, and departed.

After the *shaman* had gone, for the visitor was none other than Ir-Kaij himself, the Eskimo lay very still under the skin mats, except for the tremors that occasionally shook him. Sign language is something the primitive mind seems to understand instinctively. The sign on the wall could mean a passage of time, a moon and a half. The sign of the hand to the throat doubtless meant something unpleasant, and the whole seemed focused upon him. Dark forebodings rose in Ood-le-uk's mind and would not be downed.

But for the strange, silent visit of the witch man, Ood-le-uk might have begun to be rather happy in his new surroundings. Under nourishing food, he strengthened and was able to be up and about. He hunted and fished with his new friend, Etel. Because of his quickness and his dexterity, he brought in not only meat enough for himself, but something extra to go in the family larder. The harassed Lalaj came to look

upon him more kindly and finally accepted him rather affectionately into the midst of her own little brood.

Squatting beside the family broth bowl and enjoying the meal in the Tschuktschi style of sucking it up through a hollow bone tube, Ood-le-uk rubbed friendly elbows with Tass and Jana, the two slant-eyed little girls. Across from him sat Etel and Mother Lalaj and Keku, the imperious, copper-colored baby that had insisted upon wreaking her will upon the stranger youth at the very first meeting. Ood-le-uk had grown so fond of the chit that he now often told her queer tales of few words and many gestures about the wild travels of the selfsame piece of green ivory that they had once disagreed over.

Like his own mother, somewhere far away, Lalaj was the bearer of over many girl children. Seeing how matters stood, Ood-le-uk could easily understand how hard it had gone with the mother of numerous dependent ones to have to divide her stores with a newcomer.

Soon after the young Eskimo was able to join in the village work, Valetka the *Kamakai* and his long bidar of whale hunters paddled down the

coast and into the home bay. The hunt had not been particularly successful. The one great bowhead sighted on its journey down coast had escaped with two good harpoons in it. A couple of small belugas were the only trophies of weeks of hard labor.

The *Kamakai* was a heavy-built man of powerful frame. But his dark face bore many wrinkles, and his shoulders were bent with the burden of wresting a living in a new mode of life. Like his son, Etel, the *Kamakai* was bundled into a tattered fur-and-leather garment that had once been rather elegant. It was a remnant of the old life when he had been a wealthy *Errim* or Reindeer Chieftain.

While their very brief summer lasted, the villagers of Igirka worked with terrific energy to lay away sufficient food for the icebound months to come. Unless carefully provisioned for, winter and early spring were starvation times in this bleak land. The winter just past had ended in a famine that took a death toll of the villagers and left the survivors mere gaunt, walking specters with scarce the strength to take advantage of help when it arrived in the shape of birds flying north

and the fish coming back from out of the deepest parts of lake and river where the intense cold had sent them.

But now while the food period was on, Igirka, to the smallest child, worked incessantly. As Oodle-uk worked with them, his mind stayed forever keyed to its utmost. There was so much newness to see, to learn, to absorb into one's very being. To begin with, even the dwellings of these people were far different from anything he had ever dreamed of. Because driftwood, so scarce back in his homeland, was washed up rather plentifully on the East Cape shores, the Tschuktschi made their entire house framework of poles instead of whalebone and the like. Whereas the Eskimo fought the cold by building partly underground, the Siberian attained comfort in his own peculiar way — by building a house within a house. The outer apartment, called a *namet,* was built up to a point at the top, where there was a hole for the smoke to escape. The low entrance was always turned to the south and was at the narrow end of the hut; the opposite end widened considerably, and in it was a low, square inner tent, the *polog,* which formed the sleeping

and living apartment. The inner tent was lighted by a lamp of train oil with moss wicks. The usual cooking fire in the outer apartment was made of wood or sometimes of bones soaked in oil.

During the brief period of summer flights of birds up from the south, all hands were turned to fowling. Ood-le-uk was fascinated with the weighted bird thong Etel and his fellows used so handily. It was a contrivance consisting of a number of long, slender leather straps, to the end of which pebbles or bits of walrus teeth were fastened. This was thrown up into the air with a swift, dexterous movement, fairly among a flight of geese or other wild fowl. The birds entangled in the loose thongs which curled in every direction were brought to ground.

Later when the birds began to moult and were unable to fly, the natives employed their trained dogs and chased them down in great numbers. Ood-le-uk's swift legs won him considerable praise for his success in this strange bird chasing. Part of the fowls were frozen and preserved in snow for the winter, and part were smoked.

Out of the fish caught in weirs staked close along the shore, or taken in nets woven of stunted

willow stems and set in the numerous lakes and streams, many strange delicacies were prepared. Some fish were merely split and smoked. Other more choice ones were dried, pounded in wooden mortars, after which they were mixed with oil and preserved in wooden vessels with narrow mouths. Still another kind were dried and pressed into blocks from which a sort of fish meal was to be grated and baked into small, flat loaves.

In the midst of so much violent activity, the Eskimo boy was far too busy to be other than happy. But if Ood-le-uk could have known of the decision that had been reached concerning his fate, his heart must have quailed — quailed even beneath that amulet of courage that lay, as always since its finding, close to his brown body.

In a night, a runner had come into the village from a kindred tribe farther back to the west. He had brought the disquieting news that the same dread malady of reindeer sickness that had made such ravages among the draught animals along the great north rivers, the Kolyma and the Aniuj, was fast spreading to the East. At any day now the spirits of the air might bring it to Igirka, even as they had brought it to his own tribe.

To any Arctic dweller, the loss of dogs is a melancholy happening. Without these light, strong, four-footed beasts of burden, there is no means of drawing home fuel or game from far places. There can be little of fowling or fur hunting. In general, fearful famine usually stalks close on the trail of dog loss.

In the face of impending danger, Ir-Kaij the *Shaman* would not wait for his hitherto set time, the coming of the new moon, to inaugurate his wild ceremonial to appease the air spirits and turn aside disease. In the secrecy of a suddenly called council of the head men of the tribe, Ir-Kaij made known his plans. He demanded that the stranger boy whom the sea had brought them, drifting in a strange canoe, should be given up to him to be sacrificed to the old Tschuktschi gods —a blood offering to avert the malady sweeping in from the west.

Though all men feared the *shaman,* some were strong enough to oppose him. The old blood sacrifices belonged to the horrors of the past when the Tschuktschi were even less civilized than in the present. Men whose lives had been touched, even slightly, by the influence of the valiant Rus-

sian missionaries dreaded to let their souls wander too far back down into the ghostly path of the old bloody cult. Valetka the *Kamakai* was one of those bold enough to set his will against the *shaman*. Valetka was a kindly chieftain. Moreover, his son, Etel, had taken the stranger youth to his heart as a brother.

But out of the darkness of the night, the weird beat of the *shaman's* drum, the maddening singsong of his chant, there was woven a spell that drugged sense and reason.

"For," chanted the *shaman* in the mystic sonorousness that seemed to hypnotize men's will and melt them as snow water to his purpose,

"For blood, for blood the spirits wail,
The spirits of the old gods wail.
The hunt dogs of Makomol die,
The sledge dogs of the Kotschen have sickened.
Shall the Tschuktschi forget the gods?
Shall the Tschuktschi withhold the offering?
Shall the Tschuktschi die on the famine trail?"

And persuaded by their *shaman,* persuaded by the superstitious fears that he played upon, the tribesmen yielded. The stranger should die.

So it came about that on this night, Ood-le-uk was snatched from his warm sleeping niche and

dragged forth to an open space beyond the village. Here, where fire flare of many bone torches shot high their ugly, smoky glare, he was flung within a human wall of fur-robed figures. To hollow sound of beaten drums the witch doctor began convulsive, contorted whirlings of a mad dance. Despair rode Ood-le-uk. He understood nothing save that he was to die. The knife in the hand of the *shaman* circling nearer and nearer to him told him that. He was like some frozen thing that could not resist, could not flee. For where could he flee in this strange land? Quick death was the best he could hope for. And now was the end. Ir-Kaij's hands reached for his throat, ripped open his garments, thrust the knife. Then suddenly, with a scream of fear, Ir-Kaij fell back, holding an arm before his eyes as a shield. The knife he left, even as he had thrust it, sticking out from the wooden case of Ood-le-uk's amulet that hung, as always, above his heart.

Others of the wild company drew near and saw — and here and there men in the circle reached hands beneath robes and drew up out of their garments similar packets secured between

two bits of wood and hung on neck cords. These packets contained crosses and their certificates of baptism, given them by the missionaries.

Even the *shaman* bowed in fear to the seemingly supernatural interference of that metal cross, that bit of ink-inscribed vellum. The Church of the white man of Europe was very far away, and her savage converts slipped back into heathenism much of the time — but still that small certificate of Christianity stirred men to better things. The executioner's knife was stayed from a fearful dread.

"Where did he get it?" demanded the pantomime of gestures.

The half-fainting Ood-le-uk pointed limply to the ice, to the water. It had come thus. He knew no more of it.

Then Tchaun, who had traveled across the mountains to the settlements of the white men, who had gone to school a little, haltingly spelled out the black marks on the vellum. One part told that Karsau and his three sons had been baptized. Another part recorded that he had sent the Czar a fine, black fox skin.

Ai, the strangeness of it all! This Karsau, a chieftain — did not everybody remember that

Ir-Kaij's hands reached for his throat, ripped open his garments, thrust the knife.

many years ago he was lost on the ice, never to be found? And *illah,* now his seal and cross had mysteriously drifted across the sea and come to this stranger in a strange land! Since that was the case, this boy was no longer a stranger — but a brother.

And so the little cross that had traveled so far and so marvelously on its ice raft, saved the life of Ood-le-uk the Eskimo.

CHAPTER IX

HERDSMEN OF THE TUNDRA

THOUGH the night wind howled across the barren land, driving a flurry of snowflakes before it, there was warmth and comfort within the *namet*. The family of Valetka sat around a driftwood fire blazing on the sunken stone hearth, finishing a meal of rich seal meat. And Ood-le-uk the Eskimo sat with them, sucking at a marrow bone.

The rest of the inmates of the *namet* might be comfortable, but Ood-le-uk was proud as well. For had not he, one-time despised stranger, trapped the seal that they were now feasting upon? He had done it in true Siberian fashion, too, with a net of thongs hidden under the ice. To these Tschuktschi tribesmen, he was proving his worth, helping them in their work and bringing in meat when famine threatened. Interested in varied activities and in seeing new things, he was

happy again, at least as happy as he could be so far away from his own people.

Summer was swiftly passing, and grim, dread winter was approaching. Three moons had waned since Ood-le-uk had come to live in the hut of Valetka.

After that terrible night when Ir-Kaij, the priest-*shaman,* would have sacrificed him to the Bloody Gods and the Christian amulet had saved his life, the Eskimo boy had been taken in as one of the tribe. Valetka and his wife treated him as their own son; Etel had become his inseparable companion; and the villagers as a whole seemed fond enough of him. For all that, Ood-le-uk could still feel fear prickle his spine when Ir-Kaij stared at him with his dark, mysterious eyes. Happily, the dog sickness passed the village by. But Ood-le-uk had an idea that Ir-Kaij still regarded him with suspicion and was regretful of the lost opportunity of making peace with the Old Gods. So the stranger boy walked warily before Ir-Kaij and sought not his company.

These unpleasant thoughts were not in Ood-le-uk's mind now, however. His stomach was too comfortably filled with seal meat to harbor such

fears. Drowsiness was upon him, and he snuggled down close to Etel, where the warmth of the fire fell upon him.

Suddenly there was a great uproar in the midst of the village. The dogs were yapping and barking, and with their noise was mingled that of the *shaman's* drum, beaten wildly.

Ood-le-uk awoke from his sleep with a start. What was happening? Valetka had already sprung up and was getting his weapons. Etel was clutching a spear tipped in bone. The younger children were crying as the mother wrapped them in their heavy fur garments. The little enclosure was filled with the tension of panic.

"Some one comes," Etel whispered hoarsely. "Perhaps an enemy. We must prepare to fight!"

Hurriedly, Valetka piled the chief treasures of the tent upon his wife's arms and herded her and the younger children out into the darkness. They were to join the other women of the village and make their way to the hill caves a short distance behind the settlement. There they would be comparatively safe.

A club was thrust into Ood-le-uk's hand. Frightened, he and Etel followed Valetka out

of the *namet* and marched over to where a group of men were gathered in front of the *shaman's* hut. Old Ir-Kaij was in their center, making a hideous din with his drum and howling to the evil spirits to depart and bring not destruction upon his people.

Above the clamor of the witch man and the baying of the dogs, Ood-le-uk could hear another noise. It sounded like an answering drumbeat, away to the south. And with it came faint clatter of hoofs and sound of voices.

As the steady *boom-boom* drew nearer, old Ir-Kaij shrieked the louder. The evil spirits were strong to-night. It would take big medicine to keep them away.

The men shoved and huddled closer together. Ood-le-uk nearly dropped the club from his trembling hand. *Ola,* Ir-Kaij was looking at him, staring hard, hard! The terrible eyes were on him, compelling him forward. Was the *shaman* planning again for a sacrifice to the spirit gods?

Then a rattle of hoofs, shouts, torch flares against the darkness broke the spell.

Ir-Kaij and the other Tschuktschi whirled

about, weapons lifted, as they waited the approach of danger.

Lighting his way with a fire stick, a man came toward the villagers, walking alone, though Ood-le-uk could see many others not far behind him.

The stranger was a short man, and old, and was dressed in a loose, wide garment of skins. His cap was much ornamented with beads and rings and was surmounted by a large raven's head.

Seeing the raven's head, emblem of peace, the villagers did not try to stop him. Instead, Valetka the *Kamakai* marched valiantly forth, walking stiffly and half-bristling it would seem, like one dog bristling at the approach of a strange dog. Then with a shout, the *Kamakai* broke into a run, dashed full at the newcomer, and flung arms about him in a glad embrace. This stranger in the night was none other than his brother, Kotschal, chieftain of the reindeer herders.

At their release from fear, the villagers burst into loud rejoicing. Kotschal and his family and the men that were with him were taken into Valetka's tent and food was pressed upon them. Lalaj and the other women and children swarmed

back home from the hill caves, and the usually silent settlement was noisy with merriment. The men admitted that they had been alarmed at the unknown caravan which had approached in the dark, and Kotschal had to tell over and over again that he was just returning from the long, overland trip to the great fair at Ostrownoje, and that anxiety to be with his brother, whom he had not seen for nearly a year, had made him continue his journey on into the night and had resulted in this ill-timed arrival.

Soon Kotschal would be setting out again on the long, winding journey of six months traveling that would take him and his herds and his sledge loads of furs back in time for the next fair at the Russian trading post. But now, while he was here in the coast village for his annual brief visit, excitement ran high. There was little sleep in Igirka that night, and next morning the village was still in the grip of pleasurable thrills.

Kotschal resembled Valetka somewhat. Both men were stocky and heavily built, and their small eyes that looked from under shaggy hair were fiery. Kotschal was much the older, however, and in his prosperity had acquired quite

an air of authority that Valetka, beaten down by poverty, did not assume.

The Nomad chieftain had brought back much Russian goods to barter for the ivory and walrus teeth and furs of the Coastal Tschuktschi, but before trading began, he open-handedly made presents to all the villagers, presents of sugar and of glass beads. To Valetka he gave a magical knife that could open and shut, one that he had purchased from the Russian traders at the cost of two fine otterskins.

Ood-le-uk was vastly interested in the strangers and their possessions, their reindeer, so like the Alaskan caribou yet wonderfully tame, the narrow, boatlike sledges, unlike any ever drawn by an Eskimo dog team.

Kotschal saw the boy's interest and began to boast about his reindeer. His herds, so vast they were — he spread out his hands in a sweeping gesture — he had had to leave most of his antlered cattle beyond the frozen river where there was sufficient moss for their food! They were so tame and easily managed that he had left only three men in charge of them. Etel would know where the moss grew and where this encampment was.

He must take this new brother of the Tschuktschi and show him the finest herd in all Northern Siberia.

Ever eager to see new things, Ood-le-uk was eager to visit the reindeer camp. So while the men were occupied with their barter, the boys, armed with their spears and carrying a present of fresh seal meat to the herders, set out for the grazing ground, a half day's journey to the south.

The snow was hard packed, and the river that lay between the village and the camp was frozen over, so traveling was easy, and the boys arrived at their destination before black night fell. The three herdsmen, old Leutt and Akam and Sanka, greeted them warmly and quickly set the fresh meat to boiling in a kettle within their small, reindeer-hide tent.

That night, as they sat close around the fire, old Leutt told many tales of his wanderings through the North country. Ood-le-uk was fascinated. He wanted more stories, wanted to hear more of the Tschuktschi's adventures.

Akam, however, could not be made to join in the entertainment. He was plainly worried. Yes-

terday and to-day, he had found the freshly gnawed bones of young reindeer calves on the outskirts of the grazing grounds. Wolves were certainly near. He had been on the lookout, but he had not been able to see them.

Next day the men took the boys out to see the herd. Up until the past four years, Etel had been a Reindeer Tschuktschi himself, so he felt quite at home among the white and brown-spotted animals; but everything was new and strange to Ood-le-uk, and he was thrilled by what he saw. Over many acres of ground spread the vast, tame herd. On all sides the sturdy-legged, broad-hoofed animals were muzzling the snow and with their forefeet adroitly digging out a breakfast of the lichens and moss buried beneath the deep, white crust.

At a peculiar whistling signal from Leutt, several of the deer lifted their heads, then vaulting snow ridges, they came on the run at the call of the herder.

"See," said Leutt, running gentle fingers through the thick, white mane of the nearest buck, "our reindeer crave the company of humankind. No other bond than love holds these

tamed ones to us. For, unlike all other domesticated animals, the reindeer is by no means dependent upon man for food and shelter. Summer or winter, it digs its own moss and needs no housing. At my whistle, Muk and Gulo and Jede have come, not for feeding, but for coddling. *Fa,* go now!" After he had scratched necks and twiddled ears caressingly, the weather-beaten old herdsman shooed the animals back to their pasturing.

As interesting to Ood-le-uk as the deer themselves were the strange harness sets consisting of collar, one trace that went under the body, and the pair of driving reins to be attached to the horns.

With much sly merriment at his bungling fingers, the herders let Ood-le-uk himself harness a staid old reindeer.

Next they taught him to sit thus and so in a queer, slim, boat-shaped sledge — to balance himself, and brace his feet, and curve his body to the curve of the trail.

Then at last he was off for a real ride in a reindeer sledge! Etel had gone on ahead driving a curvetting, arched-necked, swift, young buck.

Ood-le-uk followed at a gay-enough pace, but driving the staid old veteran of the one-trace harness that he had been practicing on all morning. Over the hard-packed snow they sped. Ood-le-uk, having driven many a husky wolf-dog team, thought he knew something about speed. But all other journeys paled beside this one. His swift, antlered steed skimmed the snow crust till the north wind whistled past his ears. It was wondrous, splendid! They crossed plains, swept into the rolling country, descending hills gloriously.

Then on ahead, things went wrong. Etel, in his exuberance, must have forgotten some of his former lore of deer driving, forgotten to sway his body to the in-curve. Anyway, on a steep trail his high-stepping steed, in accordance with the habit of all sledge deer, swerved sharply aside at the hill base to keep the sledge prow from ramming against his legs in the swift descent. At the swing of the boat sledge across trail, out shot Etel, all in a huddle.

Ood-le-uk, coming close behind, had much ado to keep from running over his friend. Wheeling his steed aside and finally halting him, he

leaped out and ran back to the scene of the accident.

Etel, his face drawn with pain, was sitting on a snow bank, rubbing his leg. With a wry smile, he tried to stand up, then sat quickly down again. *Va,* to think that he, once a Reindeer Nomad himself, should come to this — spilling out of a sledge and nigh breaking all his bones! Of a truth, no bones were really broken, but the chagrined Etel was well battered up.

The young buck had stopped a little distance off, so Ood-le-uk helped Etel back into his sledge, and they returned at a more sober pace.

At the camp they found a strange Tschuktschi with the herders. The man was on his way home from a trapping excursion in the north valley and had stopped by the camp to bring ill news. From his sledge, he dragged a lean wolf carcass.

"See," he said, "the wolves are mere starving, famished skeletons, else they would not venture so into the very haunts of men. I killed this one as it tried to feed in the midst of my sledge dogs. And worse still, a pack, a gray horde of them, is working down into the south valley. I saw it with

my own eyes and said to myself, 'The men that keep the reindeer must be warned!' "

Akam thanked him. They would build fires, try to protect the herd, though his helpers were but few. He looked anxiously toward the north. He needed the advice of Kotschal, and he needed many more herdsmen.

Sanka offered to go for the *Errim,* but because he was strong and knew how to manage the animals, Akam could not spare him in this time of danger.

The leader glanced around. He could not spare old Leutt's wise head, either. And Etel, who knew the country well and should have been able to make a swift journey, was hurt and not able to do much of anything.

"I will go," cried Ood-le-uk, leaping to his feet. "I can find the way even if night is coming on."

An expression of relief showed on Akam's face. "Take a reindeer sledge. Then you will go swiftly," he urged.

"*Na, na,* I might go wrong, trying to drive an unknown creature in the dark. But on my snowshoes I can travel like the wind itself," the boy boasted.

Ood-le-uk, already dressed warmly in heavy bearskin garments, thrust on his shaggy gloves and cap and set out at once. It was late in the afternoon, but he was sure he could make swift time and reach Igirka before the night was far spent.

Across the drear snow wastes he sped. The rocks and the scattering of stunted willows were already sheathed in winter ice. The cold, gray sky pressed low above the earth, like a curtain that was quickly shutting out the light as night closed in. Between the boy and home lay the frozen river, Ansu. When he reached that, he would be nearly halfway to the village.

But as he traveled on, he found it hard to keep to his vaunted speed. A bitter-edged wind sprang up, slashed full across face and limbs, slowed his steps. In spite of effort, darkness had been upon him about two hours before he even reached the frozen river.

As he set foot to the crystal bridge of the river ice, the windstorm seemed to reach its crescendo, whipping the snow about him in long, wavering spirals. Ood-le-uk, pressing steadily against the blast in a sort of half run, wriggled himself deep down into his furs until little ex-

cept his eyes was exposed. And these roved incessantly, searching through the ghostly moonlight for guide marks of the trail, a peculiar formation of ice ridges there, here a stick he and Etel had dropped at their crossing yesterday. As he swung along, the web of his snowshoes struck a stretch of bare, glassy ice, and suddenly, without warning, his feet shot out from under him. He was flung full-length against ice that cracked brittlely under his impact.

The next instant he was struggling desperately in space, his hands clutching at the smooth river ice that seemed to move and slip out of his fingers.

As he reached this way and that, fighting for a hold, it seemed strange that he felt no rush of river water sucking at his body, striving to draw him under.

For a moment Ood-le-uk caught hold and hung; then the rotten ice of his support began to crumble, and down — down he crashed, into a hard, smooth surface.

For a little while he lay, half stunned. Then his senses came back to him, and he was able to move and look around. He put his hands to his

face, to his clothing. He had fallen through the ice into the river, and yet he was not wet. It was strange, uncanny. Not two moons ago, he and Etel had fished together in this very stream, lowering baskets of woven willow rods into the swift-running water and getting much food, *muk-sun,* the fish with the round back, and *nelma* and *tschir*. Where was the water now? By the pale shine of the stars he could see that he had landed in a deep hole, or rather an ice-roofed passage-way, for while on two opposite sides there were walls of ice and frozen earth, on the other sides, as far as his eye could reach, there was nothing, only dread darkness that swallowed up the glimmer of light let in from above.

Suddenly Ood-le-uk realized what had happened to him. He had heard Valetka tell of such ice traps formed in Siberian rivers. The water froze swiftly on the surface, then an ice wall formed at the fountainhead in the mountain and blocked the flow of the stream. Therefore the water that was already in the channel rushed onward to the sea, leaving an empty corridor with a crystal roof.

It was into such a place that he had fallen, and

now it was for him to get out and go on to the village to give his warning.

In spite of his heavy, clumsy clothing, cut Siberian fashion, Ood-le-uk was nimble. He jumped and jumped, tried to reach the ice at the top by which to pull himself out, but he could not even touch it. The opening, through which he fell, was far above his head.

Doubtless there were none to hear him, yet in his frenzy, he yelled again and again. But the lonely wind flung the words back into his face. Then upon the gale, faint and far away, came another sound. Was it the howl of the wolf pack?

As he listened, Ood-le-uk's heart went cold within him. He knew the hunger of these gray killers of the North. A boy alone on the tundra would be their easy prey.

Then a feeling of relief surged over him. Down here, beneath the ice, he was safer from the night prowlers than up on the wind-swept wastes.

But as he thought of his security, even such as it was, Ood-le-uk became ashamed of his weakness. Akam had trusted him with a message to deliver. Danger or not, he must get the warning to Kotschal.

It was no easy matter, however, to know how to get out of the pit. As always, he had his knife with him, so he tried hacking out a foothold in the side walls, trying to reach the top, so he could prick a hole from beneath the ice, near the side wall, and thus climb through. But he soon gave this up as a vain endeavor. The ice roof where it joined the bank was so solid that, with only the small knife to work with, it would take days to chip an opening.

Then he had another idea, but it proved as futile as the first. He thought to collect ice blocks and pile them one upon the other until he had built a stairway by which to escape from his prison. But there were no ice blocks to be found, though he searched a long distance down the fearsome dark of the frozen corridor.

Disconsolately the boy flung himself down on the ice floor. Terror overwhelmed him. He was trapped in an icy tomb. He had no food. In a day, in a few other days, starvation would be upon him. All alone in the cold, he would have to wait for death to come upon him, not mercifully soon, but slowly, inch by inch.

This thought maddened Ood-le-uk. He could

not passively accept such a fate. He must try, he must try again for freedom.

He struggled to his feet. His garments crackled with the sound of tearing as he moved. Damp from his body heat, they had already frozen slightly to the ice-covered floor. And noticing this, hope came again to the desperate boy.

With his iron knife, Ood-le-uk slashed off long strips from the bottom of his fur robe and knotted them into a stout rope.

Rubbing this on the ice to wet it, he tossed one end up through the opening. There it must anchor itself by freezing to the river ice and thus provide him with a ladder on which to climb to the plains above.

After a long wait, the boy tugged cautiously at his improvised rope. It seemed firm, so he trusted his weight upon it and started climbing up.

As he was halfway to the top, the frail anchor gave way and he crashed back into the pit, sitting down uncomfortably hard.

For an instant Ood-le-uk sat still. Then into his ears the wind again swept the far-blown howling of the wolf horde.

His friends, the Tschuktschi, — he must get the word to them.

His last failure had discouraged him, but it was not the end of trying. The idea was good, but the method employed in carrying it out could be improved.

From his robe he cut off the bearskin hood, cured with the shaggy hair still upon it, and fastened it to the rope. Then from his *pooksak* he took his flint and bundle of dry moss, equipment that no Eskimo ever travels without, and made a flame. Quickly the heat of this melted some ice into a little pool of water. Thoroughly wetting the thick hair of the bearskin, Oodle-uk then flung the hood through the opening upon the upper ice, to become a firmer anchor than the first had been. And after a longer wait than before, to allow plenty of time for freezing, he managed to drag himself out into the open.

There he forced himself to stand, to run. And finally he reached the village of Igirka.

Kotschal and Valetka, snoring comfortably by the fire, were startled into wakefulness by an exhausted boy who stumbled into the *namet* amid an uproar from their dogs.

"From Akam — get the herd in — wolf pack coming!" Ood-le-uk managed to gasp.

"Maha! Umonio! Nak! To the herd!" roared Kotschal, instantly awake and snatching his weapons. "The wolves are coming!"

While Mother Lalaj was feeding hot seal broth to the prostrate Ood-le-uk and rubbing warmth into his aching legs, the Reindeer Chief and Valetka and many other men with their dogs set off to the camp, not waiting for daylight. There was work enough to keep all hands busy — the animals had to be gathered in, circling fires lighted, and a constant fighting kept up against the horde of gray killers that had descended upon the valley of the Ansu.

For two nights, and then another, the Tschuktschi waged their warfare against the wolf pack. With club and firebrand and stone-tipped arrow they fought against fang and animal cunning. And the Tschuktschi won out. Thanks to the Eskimo boy who had brought the word in time, the herds of Kotschal were saved.

And some while later, when the caravan was making ready to turn back upon its long tramp

to Ostrownoje, a very unexpected thing happened. Old Leutt led into the village a white reindeer buck, young and vigorous.

"From my master, the *Errim,* to Ood-le-uk of the swift legs and strong heart," said the old herdsman, placing the halter in the boy's hands.

Out of the *namet* came Valetka and his brother, their dark faces all wreathed in smiles. And after them rushed out Etel, shouting to his friend, "We go to the Great Fair — with the caravan, — you and I!"

Dazed at the prospect of such a splendid adventure, Ood-le-uk turned questioning eyes upon his elders.

Kotschal nodded graciously, "We ourselves — glad to have so brave, so fine boys travel with us. Perhaps you learn to be rich traders, too, some day."

CHAPTER X

THE WHITE DOE OF MALAJA

LIKE the onrush of the siberian wind, Oodle-uk darted through the low tunnel and into the mound of ice which was in reality a tiny, dome-shaped hut, built of blocks of ice well plastered with snow, after the fashion of the temporary shelters used by Eskimo hunters. "She let me get close, close to her to-day!" he shouted jubilantly, as he stamped the snow off his reindeer-skin *torbassy,* or Siberian boots.

Etel was softening a fox pelt with a bone scraper, but he nodded interestedly. Soon, very soon, perhaps, the White Doe of Malaja would be theirs.

For a period of many sleeps now, ever since the sun had entirely disappeared below the horizon, the two boys had inhabited a snow house set by them in the midst of the Arctic waste. Desolate enough the scene was, even in summer under the light of the welcomed sun, when the

drab color of the ground was relieved by patches of moss and dwarf larches. But it was doubly desolate in winter, with snow covering everything and no light but the pale glimmering of the moon or the aurora that could but rarely pierce the constantly overhanging mists and fogs.

Queer indeed was the quest that had brought these two into the frozen wilderness of the tundra. They had come to tame and capture the famous White Doe of Malaja.

For more than two moons the Tschuktschi and the Eskimo boy had joined in the wanderings of Kotschal's caravan. Westward from Igirka the trail had lain, not straight to their destination, the Great Fair at Ostrownoje, but by circuitous routes where moss might be found for the whole vast herd that was Kotschal's riches and his pride. Wherever Kotschal went, his herd went with him. This Nomad herdsman and his family lived by means of their reindeer — they ate the curds, milk, and meat, made garments and tents of the skins. In return, the Nomads spent their lives seeking good pastures for their animals.

Ood-le-uk, too, enjoyed a pride of ownership, for his gift buck, which he had named Zha, also traveled with the herd. Under the tutorship of old Leutt, he had taught the fleet young creature to draw a sledge and to come in answer to his call.

Life on the tundra interested the boys, and there was excitement in being always on the march, with only brief periods of encampment. There was much to keep them busy, too, in putting up and taking down the skin tents, in hunting along the way, and caring for the herds. They took special delight in driving the sledges laden with lichens for the reindeer. These pack sledges formed a part of every caravan, for no matter how carefully the route was chosen, it not infrequently led through regions so stony that there was no food at all to be procured for the herds.

Finally the caravan had approached the vast, frozen desert of Malaja, and Kotschal had made preparations for skirting its southernmost rim.

That first night in the desert, as they huddled around the camp fire, old Leutt told many tales of a mysterious white doe that at certain times appeared in the desert land. A charmed life the

creature seemed to lead. The Siberians believed that luck followed in the trail of those great, shovel-shaped hoofprints, so she was spared their spears and arrows. But every nomad Tschuktschi had a secret longing to capture the splendid creature for his own herds. Many times she had been hunted with dogs and lariat — but never caught. Once an enterprising chieftain had had a stockade trap built of ice blocks, with wide, flaring sides, a funnel entrance, and a cliff drop as a rear protection. Penned in here, her captors thought they had her at last. But the splendid one, rather than sacrifice freedom, made a death leap over the precipice — and by a miracle, escaped unhurt. After that, she had not been seen near the haunts of man. In the fall of this year, however, old Leutt had heard a rumor that the White Doe was wintering again in Malaja.

Ood-le-uk and Etel were immediately interested. What if they could capture the White Doe? The adventure appealed to them. *Aneca!* they would try a plan different from any tried before. They would not use force but gentleness. Offerings of moss might lead her to them.

"You go in and get her," urged the old *Errim*.

"She worth ten reindeer. I give you that many from my herd, if you get her for me."

The boys were astounded. Ten reindeer to be their very own! That would put them on a fair way to riches.

Eagerly they made their plans, Etel taking the lead as he knew something of the country, having traveled the route in earlier years when his people were traders. Kotschal would skirt the desert in a wide semicircle, but the boys were to cross the waste lands, capture the doe, and rejoin the caravan on the other side.

So it came about that Ood-le-uk and Etel packed supplies into the far snow barrens, built a hut of ice blocks, and settled down to the strange winter's task of taming a white doe.

Often they caught glimpses of their quarry. All up and down the valley they set out baits of moss. And gradually nearer to their camp they moved the offerings with which they hoped to tempt the white one's friendship. Now and again, they came upon her, eagerly licking up their offering. And this day, when Ood-le-uk had burst so excitedly into the ice hut, he was fairly wild over the fact that she had let him come so close.

But after the boy had freed his boots of snow and hung his hand bags and shaggy cap above the fire to thaw, he sobered down somewhat. Out of his *pooksak* he drew an oddly-shaped, bone-headed arrow.

"See what I have here," he said.

"*Va,* another one?" the startled Etel dropped his fox pelt and came over for an examination of the object. "Where was it this time?"

"Stuck in the moss you put out. Must have been put there before time of moon rising . . . The night's storm drifted over any footprints."

"If it leaves any footprints," put in Etel fearfully. "It might be the storm spirit's way of telling us to leave this place."

"I think it is a human," said Ood-le-uk soberly.

The Eskimo boy thought he knew the author and the reason of these fearsome messages. The morning after he had left Igirka as part of Kotschal's train, his pleasure in the journey had been tempered somewhat by the sight of old Ir-Kaij, fur tails, drum, and all, who had evidently silently joined the caravan in the night. Ood-le-uk had hoped that the *Errim* would return the un-

bidden guest to his home. But Kotschal, for all his Russian baptism at the Great Fair, still mixed his religions and seemed to think that a *shaman* might come in handy as a protection against the demons of the tundra, so he had made the ancient witch doctor welcome. Ir-Kaij's presence had filled Ood-le-uk with uneasiness; he could not help but feel that the *shaman* still wished him ill. And now that he and Etel were alone upon the frozen desert, away from Kotschal's protection, his uneasiness was crystallized into fear by the receiving of these symbols of hate. The enmity of Ir-Kaij must be at the back of all this.

These mysterious visitations became a source of great worry to the boys. One morning they awakened to find a murderous-looking stone hatchet stuck in the entrance tunnel. Another time, it was the imprint of a bloody hand upon the crusted snow of their tiny hut.

"It gives me a coldness down the backbone," shivered Etel, "like waking up with a spear between the shoulder blades."

Pluckily, however, the boys went on with their business of taming the great deer.

Then, as mysteriously as they had begun, the threats ceased.

Every day now the white doe grew gentler, yet the work of winning her confidence was still heartbreakingly slow. It meant long, painful waits in the winter air that stabbed and bit like hunger. Etel achieved a frostbitten ear and Oodle-uk's old wounds in shoulder and leg, where the bear and the walrus had slashed him, ached again after these cruel exposures.

At last the White Doe nibbled moss from an outstretched hand.

That night the boys lay long awake, perfecting their final plans. They must make a sledge and fashion a collar and reins from a soft, tanned hide. They must train the great deer to harness, then speed across the desert to the feeding grounds where Kotschal had promised to wait for them. The White Doe of Malaja in harness! It would be a triumph, a victory!

The next morning they shouldered pack straps and set out for the coast, where a long, narrow arm of the sea dipped into the valley, to hunt for bits of driftwood suitable for sledge building.

But they did not get there as they planned.

They were about halfway across the valley, when, with a roar, a storm struck them. With a fury that was terrifying, the glacial wind bore down upon them, and they were utterly helpless before it. Powdered snow whirled upward like foam in a sea gale. In an instant even the pale winter light was gone, and in the darkness they stumbled on in a frantic attempt to keep their bearings. How far and in what circles they wandered, they never knew. At last, for shelter, they scrambled into a ravine that seemed at first a mere crack in the valley wall. To their surprise, the gully deepened into a small canyon at the far end of which appeared a tiny glow. Of their struggle down to the light, the boys remembered but little, only that at last they staggered into the cozy interior of a *namet,* where a fire of bones soaked in oil made a place of warmth and delight.

As the boys' eyes became accustomed to the light, they saw about them native hunting weapons. Then, on the other side of the fire, they perceived the huddled form of a Tschuktschi youth lying face to the wall.

To their persistent inquiries, the boy finally replied brokenly, "I am Nakk-Lik — leg very sick — old woman wolverine, she claw, so —

Powdered snow whirled upward like foam in a sea gale.

and so!" Dramatically the boy's skinny fingers imitated the cruel animal claws.

Etel and Ood-le-uk tenderly removed the stranger's bloody *torbassy* and treated his wounds as best they could. Through it all, the other was stoically silent, but now and again into his pain-glazed eyes, there flashed a look almost of hatred. During the remainder of the day, he lay with face to the wall and dully refused to answer any more questions.

It was while they were warming themselves over the fire that Ood-le-uk's keen eyes discovered a bundle of the queer, long-headed bone arrows. These were identical with the ones found stuck in their moss heap. The boys stared at each other in amazement. Could this youth, so near their own age, be the mysterious enemy they had so feared? This one, and not the malignant Ir-Kaij? It was unbelievable!

But in that storm-bound night strange things were revealed. While the wind raved outside, the unknown boy, restless under his suffering, began to mutter feverishly. Much of mystery was uncovered in his delirium.

Nakk-Lik, it seemed, had for three winters

followed the White Doe, camping beside her feeding grounds of the snow barrens, striving with offerings of tundra hay to win the splendid creature's confidence. Through all the toil and cold and loneliness had burned the spark of hope that some day he would go back to his people driving in his sledge harness the White Doe of Malaja that left good luck in her footprints. Ai! They had need of good luck. His tribe had dwindled to a few wretched families. Sickness had swept away their reindeer and then their dog teams. They had no way of a livelihood now but fishing and bird snaring. But should the White Doe of Malaja come among them, they would be given new courage, a new hold on life. Then, just when Nakk-Lik had overcome the beautiful doe's innate man fear and seemed on the trail to success, the two strangers from the great caravan had come to his far valley. With their additional moss and food, they had profited by his gentling of the doe and taken her away from him. And now Nakk-Lik desired nothing else but to turn his face to the dark and die.

Back by the fire, the two boys stared soberly down into the yellow glow. In silence, each was

fighting the same fight. Morning found them a rather haggard pair. Ood-le-uk first broke the stillness. "There is one thing only we can do," he said.

Etel nodded forlornly. "We'll never have another chance to get ten reindeer, though."

During the next few weeks, the boys gradually trolled the White Doe into the canyon domain of Nakk-Lik, to whom they felt she rightfully belonged.

Silently, the young Tschuktschi, now recovered of his wounds, received in his hands the soft, leather halter the boys had at last succeeded in knotting about the White Doe's neck. Silently he watched the two tramp sturdily back up the canyon.

No word of gratitude — after all they had given up, too. Etel and Ood-le-uk were sore at heart.

Back at their hut, the boys gloomily set about packing their lean bundle of furs. When the weather broke, they would set out to join the caravan.

Next morning's daylight found them hard at it, knotting thongs, shifting pack weights. The

air was crisply clear, a good day for travel — they might as well get along without further waste of time. But in the midst of their preparations came Nakk-Lik with a queer request that they go with him; he would show them something that only he knew about. At first, the boys refused. They were impatient to get under way. Finally, in response to his repeated urging, they agreed to go with him.

But what Nikk-Lik had to show them was not so remarkable after all, or so it seemed to Etel and Ood-le-uk. After half a day's journey down the valley and across the snow plain, they came to a range of low hills formed of jagged, black rocks. And there Nakk-Lik showed them, wedged in between the stones and partly covered by snow, an enormous ivory tusk.

Ood-le-uk gasped. He had seen plenty of walrus tusks but never one so large as this. When questioned, Nakk-Lik could not give much information. He had found this before the long night began. He had heard his father tell stories of such things. There was a place, to the north, he waved his hand in a vague gesture toward the ice-bound ocean, where there was much ivory

like this, bones of huge animals dead long years ago. "This is yours," he indicated proudly.

This was not anything to equal the ten reindeer with which they had hoped to start a herd of their own, but still it would be something to take to the Great Fair.

"But Nakk-Lik, want you not this for yourself?" questioned Ọod-le-uk.

"*Na,*" replied the Tschuktschi, a shining light coming into his face. "You keep. You gave back to me the White Doe, so I take luck to my people. Now I give you this."

CHAPTER XI

OSTROWNOJE

OSTROWNOJE — the Great Fair! Words with which to conjure visions; Ood-le-uk the Wanderer felt his heart-throb quicken as his imagination ran riot over the wonders soon to come.

Behind him lay a great journey. Traversed in a direct line, straight as the raven flies, the distance from East Cape on the sea edge to the banks of the River Aniuj was not more than a thousand versts. But by the route that he and the Reindeer Nomads had come, a route of long, circuitous wanderings in search of pasture for the herds, it had been a journey of three times the thousand versts and had taken the better part of five moons to accomplish.

Behind the nomad tribe lay trackless wastes of snow barren and desert tundra. Of late, though, they had come into a well-beaten trail. Three days back they had passed a village of many huts on

the river bank. It was an empty village. All the inhabitants must have gone on already to the Fair. Then but yesterday the trail had passed beside a tall, wooden cross. The sight of the crossed pieces standing upright in the snow had given Ood-le-uk a strange prickle of excitement. In shape it was like the amulet of crossed pieces of metal that he wore in the wooden case hung against his breast. Ood-le-uk understood nothing of the meaning of the cross. To him it was merely his "strong medicine", his luck piece that had given him strength, had saved his life on that night when the sacrificial knife had thrust at his heart.

Kotschal the Chieftain, himself, understood little enough about the cross. To him it was the sign of the white man's God to whom he dimly bowed and whom he accepted along with numerous wild spirit beliefs. But yesterday the sight of the wayside cross had stirred something in Kotschal's primitive instinct after religion. Despite the mutterings of Ir-Kaij, *shaman* of the old gods, the *Errim* had paused in his journey to sacrifice a young white reindeer beneath the cross. He was coming into the land of the white

man, and he craved the favor of the white man's God.

To-day many trails converged into the great, broad-beaten, main trail. All the footsteps of this northern world seemed to be leading to the palisaded Russian town.

This Ostrownoje was situated on an island in the River Aniuj. But now, at the season of midwinter, the frozen waters of the stream firmly joined it to the mainland.

Some distance above the trade town, Kotschal halted and laid out his main camp in a little valley where the reindeer lichens grew thick beneath the snow and there was feed for many days for his herds. 'Akam and a number of his helpers were left in charge. Then the long sledges loaded with the chieftain's tents, his household necessities, his great skin bags of furs, moved down trail. The boys had charge of that sledge drawn by Zha, Ood-le-uk's own white buck. On this was packed the small store of things Valetka was sending for barter — a few broad bands of walrus leather, some pierced and strung wolf's teeth, pliable strips of whalebone suitable for sledge runners. Among these goods were stored

the boys' own possessions, their hides and the ivory piece.

Dusk caught Kotschal's trade train still moving down the broad, snow road to all the usual noise of reindeer transports — the remarkable *clap-clatter* of cloven hoofs, excited shouts of the drivers of the score of sledge animals.

Then quite suddenly beasts of burden, runners, escort of shaggy wolf dogs dashed into the vast illumination that was Ostrownoje. A week ago this town of the *ostrog'* or fort, had been a mere handful of Russian wooden houses set down within its encircling wall of logs. But for seven days the whole of the North, for a radius of a thousand versts, had been pouring its nomad tradespeople down converging trails to this center. Besides the Tschuktschi tribes, come from the farthest northeast of Asia, and the Russian merchants with their hundred pack-horse loads of civilised goods, come all the way up out of Europe, there were gathered here strange Siberian tribes from a vast circuit — Jukahires, Lamutes, Tungusi, Tschuwanzi, Koriaks.

The Russians were nowhere to be seen. They were camped within the log walls of the fort.

But outside the *ostrog,* the islands and banks of the river swarmed with various tribal encampments. Blazing watch fires of bivouacs and tents contrasted fantastically with the calm brilliancy of the starlit heavens and the pale-green, reddish, or straw-colored light of the incessantly varying aurora.

No one seemed to have any thought of sleep. Everywhere was noise, beat of drums, howling of hundreds of dogs, laughter, calls, music of strange, stringed instruments pricking the air.

The laughter and music stirred the boys, awoke within them desires to mingle with and become a part of, the insistent excitement. They went through the routine of encamping with all haste. Lodge poles were fairly flung into place and round-topped skin covers bound down. As sign of his rank and chieftainship, the branches of a tree before Kotschal's great tent were hung with bows, arrows, quivers, clothing, pelts, and household articles. Some especially choice reindeer were tethered near and fed with fine moss. Fires were lighted both within and without the tents. The space of an hour saw the whole camp thoroughly at home in its new situation. Above the

outdoor fires pots and cooking stones were set up. A meaty aroma of boiling and broiling filled the air. But not even hunger could tie the boys to camp. Thrusting into their sleeve pockets some packets of dried-and-pounded fish bread that the kind Ulga, wife of Kotschal, gave them to nibble on, they were off to sight-see.

Twice before this, Etel had come to the Great Fair, once in early childhood, and once again some four years back, before the dread reindeer sickness had killed off all his father's herds. So from experience the young Tschuktschi rather knew his way about this vast, composite camp. As the hollow *boom-a-boom* of a *shaman* drum had called old Ir-Kaij off to join his fellow sorcerers in some sort of séance, so the gay twang of bala-laika, or lilt of bone flutes lured the boys on.

The leather tents of a little encampment of Jukahiri were set up in the snow not far away. These people were entirely different from any Ood-le-uk had ever seen before. Though their dress was the flowing fur robe of most of North Siberia, their faces were long and pale, in direct contrast to the usual round-headed, brown dweller of the Arctic. The whole encampment

was gathered about one of the big out-in-the-open fires, eagerly drinking in the impassioned words of a wandering *Tadibe,* or story-teller, a fellow come from that far-western Asiatic land along the Gulf of Taimar. The *Tadibe* was a dwarfish little man with yellow-brown complexion, a thin beard, and raven-black, shaggy hair. His coat of reindeer skin was hemmed with red cloth. As sign of his trade he carried a little one-bottom skin drum that tinkled to the brass rings hung around its edge. Now and again he thumped it to emphasize some point in his story. The tale itself, he told in a medley of Russian, Tschuktschi, and Jukahiri, this mixture being the official language of the Great Fair.

As the boys eased into the entranced group, a pleasant-faced old Jukahiri greeted them courteously with the softly murmured Russian salutation of *"Sdorowo."* Etel, whose people had not been Russianized so much as the Jukahiri, made answer with a half whispered *"Toroma",* which was the best his Tschuktschi tongue could do in pronouncing this greeting word borrowed from the white Russians. Ood-le-uk, overcome with timidity, said nothing at all, merely stood still and

absorbed what he could out of the *Tadibe's* strange tale.

The primitive minstrel was chanting one of those folklore tales of creation that most of the Arctic races have in common. It was all about the long-forgotten times before any land rose up out of the sea. One day Num, the great spirit that lives in the air, who sends down rain and snow, who whirls the thunder spear and the lightning, whose garment is hemmed with the rainbow — one day this Num rowed out across the empty sea in his boat. There he saw something dark moving on the face of the waters. He rowed close and harpooned it. Num thought it must be a great whale, for the blood gushed out from the wound his spear made. But soon Num saw it was a huge mass without beginning or end. The life ebbed from it. So he tied his towline to it and dragged it over to the side of the ocean and there made it fast. And that was how the land came.

Ood-le-uk listened excitedly. This was like a story his own father, Katok, used to tell of a winter night when the Eskimos of Tekelerik sat in a circle about the potstone lamp in the hut of

assembly. Only in Katok's tale the great spirit was called the Raven, and the boat he rowed in was a kayak. Katok had proof of his tale, too, for Ood-le-uk well remembered that when he was a young child, his tribe had camped one summer on a high, rugged spit of rock that jutted out into the sea. There among the ruins of old houses was a black hole that pierced straight down through the rock. This hole, so Katok had said, was the very spot where the Raven God had pierced the land mass with his harpoon so he could tie his towline to it.

Emotion surged through Ood-le-uk, and he had to shut his eyes quickly to keep back the stinging tears. His own people — where were they? Would he ever get to them again? For a moment the words of the story-teller had seemed to have almost wafted him back to his homeland.

When he blinked open his eyes again and shook himself back into reality, the wizened little, yellow-faced, bearded story-teller had launched forth on another tale. This one was about a hero who conquered all his enemies — the north wind, the ice, the famine. Then the last enemy, death, conquered him. Like all true story-tellers, the

Tadibe trembled his body and quivered his voice and during the more pathetic parts of his story wept and covered his face with his left hand, while his right hand, holding an arrow, directed its point to the ground. His audience was with him. Their groans accompanied the hero's death. Then when, as a splendid climax, he soared upon an eagle to the clouds and thus escaped every enemy even in death, these Jukahiri expressed their delight by a triumphant shout that mingled with the wild drumbeats with which the *Tadibe* ended his story.

By every right, Etel and Ood-le-uk ought now to have been ready to crawl into their corner of Kotschal's double tent and get some sleep. They had worked hard and walked hard and had seen much in the last twenty hours. But like everybody else at this vast gathering, excitement seemed to buoy them up. There was so much here still to be seen. For only a few days would last this gathering of the tribes, this concourse of pleasant noise and light flashing, feastings, songs, strange sights — and stranger music and peoples. Just a little while and a separate trail must swallow up each caravan. Instead of numberless ruddy

watch fires and jolly companionship, there would be only the wind and the snow of the long trail. *Il-uj ola!* One must look while one could look!

By torch flares set on the river ice, some Tschuwanzi were racing their fine sledge reindeer along a course well lined by their assembled tribesmen. The winner was presented with a handsome, blue fox-skin, while the loser was consoled with two walrus teeth in a little skin bag and the hope they would bring him luck.

Another style contest was the set of footraces among the shaggy Koriak men from the forest country. Despite their cumbrous fur dress, these woods runners bounded swiftly over the snow almost as fast as a deer could run.

But the noisiest and gayest of all the encampments was that of the Tungusi gypsy folk down at the far end of the island. Theirs were the fiddle-stringed balalaika and the shrill little flutes that had been calling, calling. *Il-uj ola!* How could youth sleep when the balalaikas were calling! Ood-le-uk and his Tschuktschi comrade naturally enough drifted on down to the camp of these horse nomads. Never before had the Eskimo seen a horse. The shaggy, stunted little

Tungusi ponies were marvels to the boy who knew no other domesticated animals than the dog and the reindeer. And even a greater marvel to this boy, of a race whom the snow barrens have stamped with their seal of seriousness, was the debonaire gayety of these horse nomads. The sprightly, swart fellows of the Tungusi camp wore costumes well decorated in glass beads from small Tartar cap to tip of turned-up shoes. A fellow throned on an upturned saddle performed the lively feat of plucking a weird tune out of the strings of a balalaika with his fingers while he accompanied it with some crude harmonies from a bone whistle set between his lips. A score of men whirled and jumped in a fantastic dance.

From behind the door flap of one of the bark tents there appeared a Tungusi girl. With her small and lively black eyes, her reindeer jacket tightly fitting round the waist and trimmed with dog skin, her scarlet moccasins, her long, black tresses ornamented with pieces of brass and tin, she fitted well into the gay scene. Her fellow tribesmen called to her banteringly, evidently wanting her to join their festivities. But she shook

her head and remained beside her tent door. In striking contrast to the handsomeness of the young woman was a bent old female in ragged furs who squatted beside a tiny fire and deftly broiled bits of meat on the end of a long, bone skewer. These she flipped into a tray beside her with a quick turn of her wrist.

"*Sdorowo! Sdorowo!* Come, strangers, join the dance!" loudly called one of the Tungusi when the two youths in their richly furred Tschuktschi coats were caught sight of, hovering shyly on the outskirts of the circle of camp-fire glow.

"*Toroma!*" greeted Etel, his eyes shining, his feet moving toward the gay camp life.

Ood-le-uk held back. He did not altogether like the sly looks of the gypsy men. To him, the slant eyes in the copper-yellow faces had a greedily appraising look that seemed to miss no detail of his and Etel's deep-furred jackets, rare minever bands on boot tops, sleek otterskins of their caps. But through his twinge of caution, the music twanged and blared, steps stamped in the snow. Here was excitement. It drew him on in spite of himself.

"What have you to trade?" bawled a swart

fellow with gay, red bindings on his leather coat seams and a tassel on his Tartar cap. "We Tungusi are traders; we have cloth strips and copper rings, beads, tea."

"We Tschuktschi are traders, too," shouted Etel recklessly. "We bring furs, teeth of wolf and walrus. We have a great ivory tusk bigger than any walrus tusk, bigger than any — "

"Bring it out — trade now!" shouted one. "Why wait for the morrow and the Russians? For the ivory we'll give you a length of cloth, red, so long," he measured his arms out wide.

At mention of the ivory, many of the gypsies left their stamp dancing and crowded close.

Ood-le-uk plucked at Etel's sleeve. Without doubt he liked not the looks of these sly gypsy traders. In a primitive instinct of dislike he could feel the very down along his backbone prickle up against them. *Illah,* he was glad they had left their ivory piece safe in its fur pack at Kotschal's camp at the far other end of the island. He only wished he and Etel had their own hides safe back there now. They had wandered over far in their adventuring.

But Etel seemed contemplating the offer. He

thrust out his own arms as if to measure the length of precious cloth.

The Tungusi trader slyly pressed his point. "Red cloth, enough to bind the seams of ten leather coats — "

A sudden commotion broke the spell of the trading. There came the squawk of an ancient female, the sudden hissing of fat frying in the embers, the smell of burnt meat rising acridly on the air.

In her curiosity to see the strangers, to hear the trading, the old woman crouched in her rags beside the near-by fire, had unfortunately upset her whole wooden bowl of meat into the flames.

Quite evidently she had been preparing the supper of the chief trader, for with a shout of fury and with features contorted with rage, he of the tasseled cap whirled about.

"Hag, bought for two deer horns and a fox-skin, you burn my meat, you — you — take that!" He kicked the howling old creature full in the stomach, doubling her over, and again, this time in the face, knocking her clear into the edge of the fire where her hair and one hand singed a little before she could roll shrieking out of the way.

Ood-le-uk's stomach turned sick within him.

In his own land women were bought and sold. A husband bought his wife from her parents. To cheer their comfortless old age, a childless couple might buy an orphan of the relatives. But never had his people treated women so and thus. The Eskimo tribes held womanhood in respect.

The stranger boy bristled angrily. Sudden rage throttled his senses. Before he quite knew what he was about, he had rushed forward and kicked the Tungusi trader fair into the fire edge, even as that one had kicked the old woman.

It was an entirely idiotic thing to do. Little good it did the ragged old crone. And as for the boys, that kick landed them in the middle of a jabbering ring of copper-yellow-faced Tungusi gypsies, each with a dagger or long-bladed knife drawn from boot top or sleeve sheath.

There was nothing to do but run for it — and run the boys did, butting a swift way through the gypsy line and speeding off across the snow. The longer legs of the Tschuktschi and the Eskimo kept them to the fore of the pursuit, but the Tungusi had them blocked off from their own home camp. The faster they ran, the faster they were getting into some vast, unknown wild. Behind them the cheerful noise and the glow of the

many camp-fires of great Ostrownoje receded perceptibly. The muffled beat of a *shaman* drum and ghostly, weird sounds drifted on the wind and seemed to come from nowhere in particular. The wavering, shaken curtain of the north lights added their burden of spectral glimmerings to already overtaxed nerves. To stop meant death, to speed on into the unknown might mean worse than death. It seemed a night when spirits rode the wind. Then an arrow from a taut Tungusi bowstring buried itself in the snow at Etel's heels and another glanced sidewise through the Eskimo's double shirt at the shoulder and drew the blood, and a very human fear sent them racing on into the unknown.

Then quite suddenly, as they thudded pantingly up a snow mound, the snow broke open beneath their feet and precipitated them into some sort of open space underground. They catapulted downward and knocked themselves half senseless on a hard, earthen floor. Up above, sounds of pursuit died away. To their ears came a steady boom like a drum beat. The smoke of many strange ingredients, burned together, hung over this underground place.

CHAPTER XII

IR–KAIJ

THE place into which the boys had fallen was an underground hut roofed over in snow. Their feet, pounding across the curved top, which had appeared to the casual eye as but a hillock on the snow field, had broken through the supporting rafters of slender larch branches. Evidently this was a mere passageway they had dropped into. A dim glow lighted it, and as they crept forward, they could note other minor passages leading out between earth walls and under snow roofs. What these side tunnels led to, one could not tell, for the spaces beyond them were dark. The main room must lie straight ahead, for from that direction came light and a peculiarly acrid smoke that bit into their throats.

Up above on the snow plain, their Tungusi pursuers were rather likely to be lying in wait for the reappearance of their suddenly lost quarry. So it behooved the boys to keep their heads be-

low ground in this covert so opportunely found — for a while, anyhow. But at the same time, anxiety to know what manner of place they were in led the Eskimo and the Tschuktschi to push forward — slowly, making no noise as they set one skin-booted foot before the other.

The square of light before them widened out into the opening of a room of sizable proportions. A weird, low chant issued from this interior, borne up throbbingly on the soft, pulsing sound of many drums. Fantastic smoke shapes wreathed upward from pot lamps in which burned strange-smelling ingredients that sent forth leaping blue-and-yellow flames. More fantastic than the smoke shapes were the human figures crouched in a great circle about the light. Some wore ermine tails sewed thickly on their robes, and these seemed to writhe to the undulating motion of the wearers swaying to the drumbeats. Here were men in horned headdresses and grinning animal masks; some in caps peaked with loon beaks and raven heads.

With a whispered, "The *shamans,* the terrible, secret meeting of the *shamans!*" Etel flung himself face downward in the shadows beside the

entrance portal. Ood-le-uk's knees seemed to melt beneath him, letting him down in a frightened huddle behind his friend. All unwittingly they had stumbled into the hidden, underground place where the witch men of half the Arctic races were gathered together to work black magic, to practice their hideous gropings into the supernatural and the unknown spirit land. Waves of terror shook Ood-le-uk, just as a storm shakes the little willows on the frozen river banks. He had no power left in him to move. He feared to stay. He feared even more greatly to be up and away. He lay, an inert mass, eyes wide with horror, staring at the grotesque beings before him. That leaping, whirling creature hung with tails of many animals might be the old Ir-Kaij. The pale-faced, be-horned one was likely enough a mere Jukahiri tribesman above ground. But here, in this underground place of blue fire and pulsing drumbeat, these became for the Eskimo boy part and parcel of the spirit world they strove to invoke.

Louder grew the drums. A *shaman* with a loon beak topping his headdress and a mask drawn across his face sprang into the center of the circle and began to pivot wildly on his heels, his breath

coming in jerky gasps. The wizard's body was rigid, his arms stretched wide, as if reaching out into a vast distance.

He of the masked face cried in a loud voice, "I go to the land of the spirits! The way is opening for me! *Hu lala! Hu-lale!*"

Above the *boom-a-boom* of the drums rose the answering cry of the other wizards, "Open be the way! *Hule-hu-la-la!*"

Flame of the lamps burned low. The room was filled with only the sighing and breathing of those present. To the primitive fears of the Eskimo boy, these could but be the breathings and sighings of souls called up from the long death. Ai, all in that underground room bowed the knee to the secret and mysterious. Imagination stirred was a powerful force.

"I leave the flesh behind! I am in the land of the dead!" wailed the wizard. "For the good of my people I have gone down to fight the Storm God. I will tame the Storm God. I fight him to save people from the tempest on the long road."

"Hu-lala! Hule-hu-la-la!" The *shaman* circle rocked and moaned.

"You hear them?" shrieked the wizard. "The

mighty, rushing wings of the storm bird — lost souls filling the heavens, raising the storm, raising the blizzard? *Hu-lale!*

"Hear the storm wind howl, hear the storm wind wail! *Che-u-u-ua! Che-u!*

"See the wind — see the wild weather — see the Storm God! I go to fight him! I will conquer him!"

As ending to his fierce chant, the wizard whirled about the room in a mad dance pantomiming the fight with the storm spirit, the thrust, the fist blow, the trampling underfoot.

From his girdle pocket he flung strange things into the fire pots, bits of powdered deer horn, strands of hair, feather of bird, sharp-odored herb that filled the air with a prickling almost to suffocation. As the blue flames leaped high again and peopled the room with wavering shadows, the burnt-herd smoke stole into Ood-le-uk's nostrils, stung his throat. Even more so it must have stung Etel's throat, for he burst into uncontrollable coughing.

Like the long-clawed wolverine springing upon its prey, the wizard leaped upon the prostrate Etel, dragged him into the light.

By this time, the *shaman* had distorted his own imagination to the point of believing anything. In pantomime he had fought the Storm God. Now in reality it must have seemed that the wild spirit he had invoked had materialized out of the very air and fallen at his feet.

With a shout of "*Fa*, look!" the masked one seized Etel by the throat with swift, snatching hands, flung him backward and forward among the onlookers.

"It is the Storm Spirit — I will kill it, I will choke it!" screamed the wizard.

Hoarse gasps arose from the circle. Overwrought imaginations accepted all things. Only, men moved back out of their places. Some as if to protect fire pots from accident. Others moving quickly as though to save themselves from touch of this ghastly thing.

On went the wizard in his frenzy, shouting, stamping, fighting with the limp, half-unconscious boy. Now he choked his victim till there was no sound of breath save a faint wheezing. Now in the manner of the wolf dog killing its prey, the witch man fixed his teeth in Etel's collar and shook him viciously.

This was more than Ood-le-uk could stand. His

own cowed spirit burst the bond that had held him shivering on the outskirts of this wild scene. For love of Etel he freed his mind of demon fear and man fear. With a yell he flung himself straight into the midst of drum throb, blue flame, sorcery — death, perhaps.

"*Hola,* away! You are killing him! No spirit this, but flesh and blood — mankind as yourselves!" Sobbing aloud, the Eskimo boy thrust back the frenzied wizard, and dropping on his knees beside the sprawled body of Etel, slowly stroked the body to bring it to life. Then he ripped open the tunic neck for breath to come again to the blue-tinged face.

Before him, the masked *shaman* rocked back and forth, chanting a wild song:

"Spirits of the storm fight against us,
Air is filled with hurrying spirit forms,
Hosts of the dead whirl past in whirling snow.
Dead men pierced with holes.
The wind howls through them.
Hark to the wind! Hist, hist!
See the spirits!
The storm!
The wild weather!
Arsuk the Storm sends his sons against us!
I have killed one!
I kill another!"

The masked wizard grasped after Ood-le-uk, but the boy whirled to his feet, and with swift-drawn knife stood the demented witch man off, all the while lifting his voice in a shout for help. "Men among you, save us; we are flesh and blood, sons of the tribe of Kotschal, Reindeer Chieftain of the Tschuktschi!"

Through the shifting, hostile crowd, Ir-Kaij, that *shaman* of the ermine-tailed headdress, thrust his way until he came close to the prostrate form on the floor.

"So it is," he muttered, "Etel of the tribe of the Tschuktschi." Turning about, the *shaman* lifted a hand. "This one is a man of my tribe. It were best to set him free. But that one," the pointing finger of Ir-Kaij was leveled malevolently at the Eskimo youth, "that one is an outlander. From the unknown the sea cast him up into the borders of my own tribe. From the unknown he drops down into our secret place. He must be some *quanoque,* some horrid spirit of the night. It were good to kill him before he spies further on us."

"Not so, Ir-Kaij —" came a weak voice from the floor, as Etel struggled up and gripped both

arms about the knees of Ir-Kaij. "By the cross sign on his breast, this Ood-le-uk is blood brother to our tribe. If you kill him as a spy, kill me also — and may the vengeance of Kotschal be upon you!"

"How came you here, anyway?" muttered the *shaman* of the ermine tails. "What mean you prying into the great, secret holy place?"

"Not as spies," broke in Etel, rubbing his poor, bruised throat as though to free the words. "Enemies pursued — we ran — what seemed a snow hill gave way beneath us — we fell — "

"Stone them both! Burn them! They turned their eyes upon our secret mysteries!" So were lifted up voices here and there in the *shaman* gathering.

Etel was on his feet now, weak and trembling, but steadying himself against Ood-le-uk. "Free us both, or kill us both; we are together, both of Kotschal's tribe. May his vengeance pursue you!"

For long the arguments raged about them. But finally old Ir-Kaij, who was powerful in his gruesome brotherhood, prevailed in behalf of his fellow tribesman. Etel was freed. And be-

cause there seemed no help for it, Ood-le-uk the Eskimo was set free with him, though there was a look in the wild, fiery eyes of old Ir-Kaij that seemed to say, "Beware, stranger, there are other times yet to come!"

Because the youths had entered the mystery house through no door, so they must go out through no door. Thus spoke superstition that ruled so mightily in the hearts of this elemental priesthood of a cult as ancient as man himself — the cult of spirit fear.

A second hole was torn in the snow wall of the hut. Ood-le-uk and Etel were thrust out once more into the calm, open silence of a world lit by stars and the fading, purple-red glow of the aurora.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RUSSIANS

EVEN into the farthest corners of Kotschal's double tent it penetrated — the pealing *klang-kalang* of the great iron bell of the fort. To its call, Ood-le-uk and Etel stirred stiffly in the pile of furs that was their bed. Adventuring in Ostrownoje had brought one a blood-clotted arrow scratch across the shoulder and had given the other a twisted neck from those long, choking fingers of the *shaman*. Altogether their own snug corner on the floor cover of sewed reindeer hides, with soft moss padding beneath, seemed suddenly vastly comfortable to weary bones. They hated to drag themselves forth into the chill of Ostrownoje.

Then it came again — "*klang-klang-kalanga!*" The call of the fair! The call to trade and barter!

With a bound the young fellows shed off sleeping robes, thrust sleep and weariness behind them, buckled on their fur *kamlejas,* belts, boots. This

was the great day toward which they had traveled for half a year.

Kotschal's sledge train was already being lined up. Trade packs of leather, bales of furs, bundles of neatly sewed deer-hide garments made in the woman tents — these were being quickly loaded on the long sledges. The tethered draught animals caught the excitement, restlessly stamped in the snow, shook their antlered heads.

Incessant clangor of the bell filled the air, drew all things to its call. Across the snow field moved the train of Kotschal the Tschuktschi. From all sides advanced the primitive trade folks of the North, marching in order according to tribes, all fully armed with spears, bows and arrows. Slowly they moved forward until they and their sledges and goods were ranged in a semicircle in front of the fort. There they stood in silence awaiting the last signal for traffic to begin.

At length the signal came; a flag shot up and stood out on the breeze, and mad confusion took the place of the ordered calm. Out from the fort gates poured the Russians loaded with their trade goods. These white men were taller and heavier

than most of the native peoples. Many of them were weathered by wind and exposure to a brownness of face as dark as any Tschuktschi. But here and there were fair-skinned, blue-eyed fellows, some red-bearded, some with beard and hair the color of yellow grass straw in late summer. At the sight of these, Ood-le-uk nudged Etel excitedly. Never before had he seen any fair-haired people. Indeed, he was finding the world full of queer things.

The Russian traders were almost violent in their eagerness to dispose of their goods. Some dragged with one hand heavy bags filled with brick tea or sugar packets and carried in the other a kettle or two, with a bolt of cloth tucked under the arm, while hatchets, knives, wooden ware, and strings of beads were stuck round in their girdles or were hung over their shoulders, as they ran from sledge to sledge proclaiming their merchandise. Everywhere was noise and confusion. Some traders were thrown down by the throng in the deep snow and run over by their competitors; and though some of them lost cap and gloves in the fall, instead of stopping to recover them, they dashed on, striving to make up for lost time by redoubled activity.

About as excited as the Russians were the Tungusi traders. Their tasseled Tartar caps bobbed up everywhere, and these lively, rascally little gypsy folk seemed intent on trading on all sides at the same time, now swapping furs with other natives, now trading the furs on to the Russians for civilized stuffs of glass or cloth.

If he felt any of this mad excitement coursing in his veins, old Kotschal the Reindeer *Errim* concealed it well under a mask of stolidity. Oodle-uk noted how the fiery-eyed little chieftain and the rest of his Tschuktschi stood quietly by the sledges and made no reply to the torrent of words poured out by their customers until a proposal met their approbation, when the exchange was effected at once.

In like manner, he and Etel, though the blood was pounding in their ears and excitement sang through their brains, strove to stand with the proper Tschuktschi calm beside their own sledge load of barter stuffs.

Three traders at once sighted their great, yellowed ivory tusk as it lay among their little store of leather and furs. With wild cries the Russians fell upon the ivory piece. One offered a length

of red cloth for it. Another offered cloth and a kettle. The third unhooked a pot, a string of beads, a knife, and a hatchet from his girdle and tried to shove this assortment in the boys' arms, seize the ivory, and be off. The young fellows had not dreamed that one piece of ivory could be worth so much. In their befuddlement they might have accepted any one of these seemingly vast offers had not old Kotschal suddenly stepped between them and the traders and lifted a hand in sign that he would made the trade. And now the bartering began in earnest. The first Russian, he of the black beard, added brick tea and a twentieth of a *pood,* or a twentieth of forty pounds, of sugar to his cloth. The red-beard raised his offer by a knife and some beads. Others joined the excitement. With loud cries and in a medley of Russian, Tschuktschi, and Jukahiri, other and greater offers were made.

It was a fine tusk, near perfect, with hardly a flaw in its polished yellow surface. Old Kotschal stood like a befurred statue of calmness, passed his hands along the treasure piece, weighed its value against the value of what was offered, and finally sealed the bargain. He of the red beard

carried it off in triumph, but in its place left behind what seemed to the boys a stupendous pile of trade goods — six lengths of fine, red cloth, four brass kettles, an iron pot, a whole assortment of knives, hatchets, beads, with some tea and sugar thrown in for good measure.

For a space Etel and Ood-le-uk squatted beside their splendid stock of stuff, excitedly touching cloth, feeling of knife edge, scarce able to believe that such wealth was theirs. They rocked back and forth with laughter over their own simplicity. Unguided by the sturdy old chieftain, they would have been quite willing to have accepted a half, a third even, of this pile of goods, for their ivory. Why — and their minds darted back to the night before — why down there at the Tungusi camp that slant-eyed gypsy fellow had offered them — one strip of cloth for their ivory! They wished now that this rascal Tungusi of the tasseled cap would come by and see the sort of traders they had turned out to be.

All about them the lively barter went on. From back in the fort, the Russians brought out new supplies of goods. From down under hidden packs the imperturbable native traders produced

now some fine mink skin, now a bit of precious, sleek, sea-otter fur. None of the natives had scales for weighing either what they bought or sold, but like old Kotschal, many of them knew exactly by the feeling of the object in hand whether it weighed rightly or was even so much as a quarter of a pound to the *pood* missing in weight.

Ola, the trading was interminable! After a while the young Eskimo lost interest in it and turned his eyes elsewhere. Up against the wall of the fort a line of armed men caught his attention. These were the Cossacks or hired soldiers of the Czar, sent on from the larger Russian settlement of Nishne-Kolymsk to keep order at the Fair and to protect the Russians and other traders. Also to see that the *jassak,* or fur tax, was collected at this time. These Cossacks were imposing figures, with long-bladed sabers strapped to the belts of their combination fur-and-cloth garments. Besides this weapon, each carried slung across his shoulder what appeared to Ood-le-uk to be long, black, metal sticks.

"Those — what are they?" he questioned Etel.

"*Fa,*" said his friend with a little shiver, "those black things are the fire-shooting sticks of the

white man. More deadly are they than any spear or arrow. They belch out fire and smoke and hard pellets that kill — so," and he puffed out his cheeks and blew between pursed lips. "At a great distance they shoot one full of holes — thus," with a stick he punched the snow in vigorous pantomime. "A Mountain Tschuktschi back up in the land where we live has one of these shooting sticks of the white man. He paid for it thirteen foxskins and the pelts of five bears. He killed many deer and wolves and wolverines with it at first. But now it hangs useless in his tent. He has no more of that which makes it belch out fire and iron. For myself, I like the spear. It needs no white man's fire powder to make it go."

While they talked, the boys strolled on up closer to the town of the *ostrog*. Now, as they passed through the wide-open gates of heavy timbers, Ood-le-uk had a chance to see at near range the murderous-looking, black-barreled matchlock rifle that rested upright in the snow before the tall Cossack that guarded the entrance. The thing rather gave him a shiver. Like Etel, he felt preference for a good, smooth spear to hand.

The two young fellows looked rather like walking arsenals themselves. The great bulk of their bought-in-trade property they had left back at the sledge in Kotschal's care. About their persons, however, mimicking the fashion of the Russian traders, they had hung an amazing amount of small ware. Knives and hatchets and even a kettle or two dangled at their belts. Long, glittering strands of beads swung round their necks and over their shoulders. In youthful bravado they could not quite resist parading their amazing wealth to the eyes of the world.

Others were sightseeing that day, too. A great crowd of native folk from the far ends of Siberia swarmed through the queer little Russian fortress town. Tartar cap, Koriak fur hood. Tschuktschi robe, garment of Russian cloth — all jostled each other on the narrow street. Wherever the boys went, a couple of swart fellows in tasseled caps dogged their footsteps, many paces behind, mere atoms in that swarming crowd, but never for a moment losing sight of the youths so be-dangled in their strange finery.

Within the heavy, driftwood palisades of this island fortress were dwellings the like of which

the Eskimo had never seen. Accustomed only to round-topped houses roofed in hides or built of snow blocks or of sod banked over whalebone rafters, the all-wood houses of Russian Ostrownoje loomed up strangely before Ood-le-uk. These square dwellings were built of logs in the Russian manner, the interstices being filled with moss and plastered over with clay; while a mound of earth was thrown up around them, reaching as high as the windows. These little windows set in the heavy walls were a foot square, and each was closed with a thick sheet of ice. Instead of round tops, these were flat roofs that did duty in more ways than one. On some were set scaffolds for drying fish. Others had a second little house built up on the roof as a kennel for the dogs. Within the stockade there were also storehouses and a sizable log building mounted with a square tower and a cross. Out of the wide doorway of the house with the tower, an old man in a black robe stepped forth. As he lifted his hands above the crowd, some knelt.

Ood-le-uk stared at the kindly face, the long, white beard, the cross on its chain about his neck.

"Father Michel," whispered Etel. "He is the

A great crowd of native folk . . . swarmed through the little Russian fortress town.

priest of the white man's God. See, he calls men into the white man's holy place."

Here and there in the crowd, men turned aside and entered into the doorway of the building of the tower. But Ood-le-uk drew back, pulled Etel after him. The only religion he knew about was the *shaman* religion. If the white man's holy place was as terrible as the mystery house of the witch men, he wanted naught to do with it.

Outside here in the street there was plenty to be seen anyway. Before they set off again on the far trails, men sought what pleasure they could in human companionship and festivity. Within a stamped circle in the snow a couple of fur-clad *bayaderes,* or dancers, trod out a strange measure. In rhythmic time, feet and bodies moved backward and forward while the dancers beat the air with their hands. Then the tempo changed, and the figures jumped to and fro and spun in a mad whirl.

Farther down the street some jugglers won considerable applause. Ood-le-uk and Etel could merely hang on the outside of this group and peer between the heads of other spectators to glimpse what they might. Within the circle a

swarthy little man lay on his back in the snow and swiftly whirled a sword about his head. With nimble leapings, in spite of his cumbrous fur dress, a second fellow skipped and danced above the whirling blade. As reward for such agility, Ood-le-uk was just rummaging in his sleeve pocket for some prized bit of glass or metal ornament to throw to the performer as he saw other spectators do, when something struck him lightly on the cheek and rolled down his body. Looking sharply, he saw, partly buried in the snow at his feet, three red beads knotted together on a strand of horsehair. Picking it up and turning about, he found Etel staring at a similar knot of beads. These were strange gifts that had seemed to drop down on them out of nowhere. Then their eyes caught another glint of red, a few paces behind where they were standing and off in the snow.The boys went toward it. This turned out to be a shred of crimson cloth — a narrow strip, but still enough of the precious, far-imported stuff to serve as a headband or to bind a seam. Could it have been placed here by the hand that flung the beads? *Ola,* and here were still other things to catch the eye!

Jugglers and sword whirlers were forgotten. For before the boys there stretched out across the snow a little trail of scattered bits of color — a blot of crimson there, far on ahead, a glint of something blue. A mystery trail of gifts dropped on the snow! What did it mean? To what did it lead? And in spite of some twinges of caution that pricked their brains, this mystery trail lured them on. Farther on down the street, and away from the entertainers, they came upon a bit of deer hide stitched in blue beads. A trail of unknown footsteps went on and on before them, now by a row of dwelling houses, now by the storage huts and by the tower house. Dropped in these footprints, they found other shreds of crimson, here some blue beads, there a hammered metal disk such as men wore on a leather cord about the neck.

First the belting with the beads tied with horsehair, and now these gifts were scattered on before them! It must mean something, some human trying to lead them on. Caution lifted her head again, told them to turn back and let the unknown be. But mystery was the stronger; mystery beckoned hot-blooded, inquisitive youth to fol-

low on. Alongside of the now silent building of the cross and tower had gone the footsteps of the unknown giver of gifts.

Mystery beckoned and won. A fool's lure of a blotch of crimson lay in the narrow way between house walls. The Eskimo and the Tschuktschi, with excitement pounding in their ears, reached in after it. The next moment the six, swart Tungusi fellows who had laid the trap were upon them. Staves and clubs and long knives flashed in the air. Ood-le-uk, penned in a wall niche, heard Etel scream as a heavy blow knocked him prostrate. For himself, with a wall to his back, he swung his own quick-drawn knife this way and that, striving to hold at bay the trio of attackers that had him cornered. In the shadowy light they looked like demons — but his senses told him they were only the swart gypsy folk from the Tungusi camp. He of the tasseled cap whom Ood-le-uk had kicked was there — out for revenge. *Ola!* and getting it, too! A jagged piece of ice, flung hard, gashed the Eskimo's forehead, half stunning him. A knife slashed across his double-furred jacket, plundering hands tore at his ostentatious treasure belt, snatching off his

trade wealth of knives and beads. He felt himself sinking from dizziness due to blows. Then before his startled eyes, an apparition of black robe and white beard darted into the mêlée, swinging a valiant club and shouting in a strange language. Before the apparition, the robbers melted away, snatching off the last of their victim's treasure as they went and scuttling forth from the alleyway.

Ood-le-uk felt a strong arm lifting him up. Snow was rubbed in his face to revive him. Through a side door, he and Etel were led into the building of the tower. By degrees, his dazed senses came back to him. He realized, with a shiver, that he was in the white man's holy place. Different it was from what he had expected. No grinning masks and sorcery. Instead, here was only a square, open room and on a high place stood a cross with little slender lights burning below it. Here was nothing to frighten one — only an indefinable peace.

On through this place they passed and into a smaller apartment adjoining. Father Michel, for their rescuer of the black robe was none other than the valiant old priest of the fortress town,

settled them down on a wide bench laid with reindeer skins and dipped up for them, out of a little pot, mugs full of a hot, comforting drink.

This was the Eskimo boy's first experience inside a wooden house. Here he found things that were strange to his eyes — a table, a chair, the *tschuwal,* or open fireplace, made of willow rods plastered on both sides with a thick coat of clay and built up into a box shape. On the wall was hung a parchment bearing lines of little black marks. This piece of writing, the cross on Father Michel's neck chain — they stirred Ood-le-uk to an impulsive action. Thrusting a hand beneath his fur shirt, he brought up the wooden locket, opened it, displayed his cross, his bit of parchment full of black marks.

Father Michel examined these with eyes aglow. Evidently he thought these were baptized Christian youths coming to him. But in mixed jargon and pantomime, both Ood-le-uk and Etel made him know something of the history of that crossed piece of metal — its loss, its journey in the drift ice, its discovery by this son of another land for whom it had become a "strong medicine."

Father Michel realized that soon the boys would be gone, following the long snow trail. He, Father Michel, had only this hour with them. It was so small a space — yet he must fill it with much. Lifting the cross, he began to tell them its real meaning — how it stood for a God of Love instead of a God of Fear; how real religion meant loving one's fellow man better than self, meant dividing the last bit of food with the hungry, meant lending a helping hand on the rough trail, meant a weariness of the flesh, perhaps, but a happiness of the heart.

As Etel and Ood-le-uk the Eskimo set out on the morrow on the long, back journey that was to lead through the strange *teplot weter,* or warm winds of the Aniuj Valley, through frozen marsh and barren land and mountain chain, they *saw* that at Ostrownoje they had gained great wealth, had lost some part of their rightful trade goods to robbers. But also at Ostrownoje they had lost some part of their burden of spirit fear. They had come to the City of the Ostrog fearing the spirits of earth and air, fearing the souls of the dead, fearing all the hideous spirit things of

which the witch men chanted. They carried away from Ostrownoje something of the peace of Father Michel's quiet, candle-lighted church, some little knowledge that the Great Spirit does not hate his children — but loves them.

CHAPTER XIV

ZHA, THE WHITE BUCK

ON the return trip the herd went far north and skirted the coastal plains on the way back to the eastern peninsula. Like the wild herds, the tame deer pursued a fairly regular migratory course — into the shelter of mountain valleys and forests for the winter blizzards and up into the chill northern sea plains in summer to escape the mosquito plague. As much as possible, the Tschuktschi herdsmen allowed the domesticated deer herds to travel by whatever age-old, pasture-land route animal instinct led them, the men merely directing the general trend of travel — westward in winter, eastward in summer.

The northern summer route brought its own varied set of adventures. Once Ood-le-uk and Etel, along with the other herders, urged the hunger-maddened animals on and on for a forced march of nearly forty-eight hours. Never once in all that stretch were the bawling, braying

beasts allowed to stop for food and water. Behind them came spearmen on foot, men on saddle animals, shaggy, fierce dogs trained to their herd task — all forces uniting to drive the reindeer forward, for this stony vale they were crossing was known in the Tschuktschi as the *Ubiennoje Pole,* the Valley of Death. Along it were strewn the bones of countless thousands of deer that in the past had perished from some strange, sweeping animal malady. It was a known fact that whatever lingered to graze on the lichens and stunted moss of the *Ubiennoje Pole* came to sudden death. In reality it was from the disease germs lurking in the whitened bones that the dread *mirak* of deer sickness was contracted. But to Kotschal, superstitious in spite of all his contacts with civilization, the *Ubiennoje Pole* was a place of demons and devil spirits.

Ood-le-uk, astride his own white saddle buck, Zha, forgot for a space what little he, too, had learned of the kindly religion of the Cross and dropped back fearfully into the old, terrible demon fear as he rode across this vale of dry bones.

Other adventures befell them on that Arctic

trail across the top of Asia. In the river-threaded stretch of country between Tschaun Bay and Cape Wankarem, the boys took part in the strangest sort of hunt imaginable — a deer hunt in boats. It was in the land of the Jukahiri, those pale-faced river dwellers of the Arctic flats. Old Kotschal left his tame herds to graze in the hill country and came down with part of his following to help these tribesmen get their winter supply of meat. The Jukahiri were of slighter build than the Tschuktschi nomads, and generations of famine had given their faces a weazened cast. If in late summer the migratory deer herds crossed their river, the Nadyr, the tribesmen lived well. If Fate staged a catastrophe and led the herds to migrate elsewhere, as she did now and again, the Jukahiri starved along on scant rations of fish and willow bark, and only the strong survived.

But this year, many deer came, a migratory body of thousands. They crossed the river at an ancient, hoof-rutted ford, where a dry valley led down to the stream on one side and a flat, sandy shore made easy their landing on the other. At the moment the herd entered the river and the

surface was covered with swimming deer, the fur-clad huntsmen in their light canoes dashed forward from their hiding places into the midst of a wild scene. The thousands of swimming reindeer, the loud clashing of antlers, the flashing canoes of hunters, the animals battling with horn and tooth and hoof, the perils, shouts, and blood-stained water — altogether it was a spectacle Ood-le-uk would be long in forgetting.

With the call of the wanderer in his blood, old Kotschal tarried but briefly on his return visit at the seacoast village of his kinspeople. After feasting and gifts, the Reindeer *Errim* set out again on the trail that led into the green ice gleam and into the horizon of perpetual snows — the trail to Ostrownoje. But this time the Reindeer caravan went westward without old Ir-Kaij and without Etel and the Eskimo boy. Etel's father had need of a son's help in feeding the large family housed in the deer-hide *namet*. Out of the Ostrownoje's journey, however, the boys had gained much: adventure; knowledge of more races of men and more kinds of religion than Ood-le-uk, anyway, had known existed; a wealth of

trade goods, left by the generous Kotschal to his brother's son.

Ood-le-uk also had his share of the remaining knives and beads, kettles and cloth for which he and Etel had traded ivory. But dearest to his heart, of all things, was his reindeer buck, Zha. Under Ood-le-uk's care on the pasture-land trail the buck had grown apace. By the time his sprouting antlers had first ridged his brow, he was sleek and strong from tundra moss and sweet lichens. Besides teaching Zha to draw the slender, boat-shaped sledge of the Reindeer Nomads, the boy had gentled his animal with such petting as to let him spring upon his back for riding. And now, in the dull routine of the fishing-village life, Ood-le-uk depended for his thrills on the mad, glorious gallops on Zha's back out and across the snow barrens. Zha was put to useful service, too. As a draught animal he competed well with the shaggy dogs hitched to their high-backed sledge, and he hauled in his share of drift-wood and bones for Mother Lalaj's cook fire. He also hauled Lalaj's youngsters about on many a pleasure-ride.

As the dark, winter months came on, Ood-

le-uk built, adjoining the leather-walled hut of his adopted family, a sort of paddock of high-piled ice blocks. In this limited space Zha could move about, safe from stray wolves that now and again invaded the village.

In their hearts, Ood-le-uk and Etel were determined to go again some day down the far trail that led to Ostrownoje. Toward this end, they traveled considerably up and down the coast, bartering their precious trade goods wisely and gathering a store of furs to be packed down trail to the Great Fair. To be fur traders of the long trail was their vision. By that means lay wealth in the Arctic land. Always, on their little barter journeys, they longed to come upon more ivory like the big tusk Nakk-Lik of the desert place had given them. That was a kind of trade goods worth carrying to Ostrownoje. But none of the huge, ancient, mammoth tusk ivory seemed to be in these parts.

On these journeys up and down the coast, Etel went by dog sledge but Ood-le-uk drove Zha, the reindeer buck, in his harness. On this traveling hither and yon, there was no time for building protecting walls of a pen here and a pen there

for the buck, so on many a night Ood-le-uk had to dash from his sleeping tent yelling wildly and waving a fire brand to ward off circling wolves from his tethered pet. Wolves were bold that winter. Hunger seemed to be driving them into the very haunts of men.

At midwinter, when he was full grown, with a noble spread of antlers, Zha began to act strangely. He snorted back and forth the length of his pen, pawed and tore up the snow with his hoofs. Sometimes he sniffed the air and took to running round and round, shaking his head violently. One day, a herd of slender-legged, wild reindeer dashed past the village. At Zha's pen they hesitated a moment, lifting their frosted muzzles and uttering their strange, guttural call *hraw, hraw!* The captive buck leaped into the air and whirled about with neck outstretched, as if he would be up and away to his wild kin. So beautifully strong and powerful had he become that but for the leather thong that hobbled his forelegs, he must have leaped the ice barrier and fled from his pen.

After the passing of the wild ones, Zha seemed to sicken. All day long he stood with legs planted

widely, as if from weariness and head drooped down to the snow. He would eat nothing, not even the handful of delicate, precious, dried berries Lalaj had saved from the summer before and now contributed to her foster son's pet. The whole household of Valetka's leather-roofed hut were concerned over the sickness of Zha, the white buck. Tass and Jana, the little girls, took time from their everlasting "woman's work" of pounding fish and scraping hides to search beneath the snow for succulent mosses. Copper-colored Keku, now a year older and sturdy in spite of eternal short rations, gravely offered to divide a fish meal cake with the big, antlered steed upon whose back Ood-le-uk had taken her for wildly thrilling jog trots. But Zha continued to stand drooping and apathetic, eyes slightly glazed, not so much as sniffing the proffered food offerings. Only when from afar across the ice sheet there drifted on the wind, the faint, guttural *hraw, hraw,* of the wild ones would Zha lift his head with nostrils widening.

At last Ood-le-uk could bear no more of Zha's brokenheartedness. One night, when the north lights hung glimmering over the ice sheet and the

stars twinkled mistily in their eternity, the boy tore away the entrance blocks to the pen. He led the buck out, held it 'round the neck, stood talking to it for a while, stroked it with his hand. Then with a quick motion of his knife, he slashed the hobble thong that loosely bound the animal — and Zha was free. In another moment the buck was gone, running in great, flying leaps to the snow barrens where the little band of wild deer lifted their heads and sent out their call to him.

Back there by the empty pen, the Eskimo youth flung himself face downward in the snow and for a long while lay still, save that now and again his shoulders heaved convulsively. His soul felt as empty as the little, snowblock paddock. Oh, why had he done this thing, let Zha go out of his life forever! And yet he could not have helped it, could not have done otherwise. Thoughts of that towered, cross-crowned log house at Ostrownoje, thoughts of candles, the words of black-robed Father Michel mingled strangely with his present feeling of loss. Father Michel had said the cross stood for love, kindness. This amulet of the cross on his breast was softening him, making him weak as a woman — *va!* But thus he had loved Zha too

much to keep him a lonely captive, shut away from his kind. For love he had had to let him go.

Down in his heart Ood-le-uk knew there was another reason, too, why he had set the buck free. Hunger was beginning to stalk the coast country. He could not have borne for men to have taken Zha for food. Even yesterday, old Ir-Kaij, back from some magic-brewing vigil out in the solitudes, had cast meaning looks upon the buck that belonged to the outlander he despised. *Ola,* yes. Ood-le-uk stood on his feet and squared back his shoulders. Better for Zha to go free — now — while there was time.

Though he ran free, Zha, for a space, now and again visited the haunts of men. One day he pawed for moss behind the village of leather huts. A night lighted by purple of the north lights found him boldly nosing the drying racks of the fisher folk. Then he disappeared, to be seen no more of man for many moons — gone across the ice mountains with his following of wild does.

Ood-le-uk, missing the tingling, glorious companionship of his antlered steed, was rather bitter at heart over the entire loss of the buck. He had not dreamed that Zha — Zha who had gone

with him the long journey to Ostrownoje and back, Zha whom he had time and again protected at his own life's risk — would answer the call of the wild to the complete forgetting of his human friend.

But as the dark winter wore on with no more returning of Zha the white buck, Ood-le-uk gave up all idea of ever seeing him again. Calmly the boy busied himself with the eternal labor of helping Valetka and Etel wrest food out of this frozen land for the little family in the pointed-roof *namet*. Sometimes the three worked together out on the ice, stolidly motionless fur-clad figures poised each above a seal hole chopped in the ice, waiting, sometimes one hour, sometimes near twenty hours on a stretch for the now rare seal forms that meant meat — life itself.

Then again, the hunters would work separately, at the fishing or the snaring or the gathering of fuel. One day, because of the pinch of hunger, no more blubber oil could be spared for the moss-wick lamp, and because wood must be sought for now to keep some kind of heat going in the home, Ood-le-uk fared far up the coast searching for drift logs. Even with Zha gone, he still in-

dulged his fondness for the boat-shaped sledge the nomad chieftain had given him, and often incongruously hitched the thing behind the dog team, as on this day when he was roaming up coast after wood.

All that morning Ood-le-uk traveled, and traveled swiftly, for Valetka's five gaunt huskies, hitched fan-wise to the narrow sledge, were fast animals. Now and again the boy halted his team and searched the shore line anxiously. But driftwood was scarce this year. Coastal storms must have washed the little, stunted logs of larch and Siberian fir to some other shore.

It was almost dusk when Ood-le-uk at last came upon a few sticks of precious wood. As he rolled a log over, he found something else of interest, a tusk of walrus ivory half buried in the frozen ground, also bits of bone, some curved and some short and knobby, such as one might carve into a ball or into a block for his own Eskimo peg-and-hole game. The ivory should go into the pack of trade goods he and Etel were slowly collecting for another dreamed-of trip to great Ostrownoje. Of the bits of bone he would carve toys for his little foster sisters at Valetka's hut, even as he

used to carve funny fishes and dolls for his own little sisters and Baby A-vik. He found little else, though, to reward his scratching and digging in the ice-bound gravel except one other tusk, this one broken and discolored as if its former owner had been the scarred veteran of many battles.

By now it was too late to make the long trip home, so the boy hitched his dog team by the simple expedient of thrusting a spear deep into the snowy ground and tying them to it. He would have to camp here this night and begin hauling logs home early in the morning. By the failing daylight, he busied himself with building a windbreak of snow, spinning the fire bow to start a cheerful little blaze, dragging logs into a pile. In his work he uncovered some pieces of bone and walrus teeth that might have value, but he had no time to be digging them out, not with dusk dropping down. Every now and then, on the other side of the windbreak, the huskies howled uneasily. Ood-le-uk knew they must be anxious for their supper, — they had had a hard run. He hustled on with his work as fast as he could. In just a bit he'd throw them their meager dole of frozen fish.

"*Are' a-neq, are a-neq* (Spring is coming, spring is coming)!" hummed Ood-le-uk in the queer little minor wail Eskimos call singing. It did not look much like spring on the bleak, snowy coast, but then spring always did come.

"*Are' a-neq, are'* —" Ood-le-uk caught his breath suddenly. It was strangely quiet beyond the windbreak. The huskies — why had they ceased their hungry whining? The boy rushed around the wall of snow. The huskies, the villains, they were gone! Only some chewed-up straps of leather dangled from the spear. The lean, shaggy dogs had gnawed the tie ropes apart and fled. In the distance, Ood-le-uk thought he could dimly see five swift-moving specks racing down the home trail. As he stood staring wrathfully after his departing team, a new sound drifted in on the wind. Ood-le-uk wheeled about, his brown face blanching at he strained his ears with listening.

Was it — could it be wolf wailing that drifted down on the north wind?

Ood-le-uk held his breath. Again it came, the wild, weird call of the wolf pack.

Ai! Ai! The fool he had been. His huskies had

tried to warn him, and he had listened not. But for his own stupidity, he could have left logs behind and have gone speeding with them down the dusky trail to safety.

For a long moment, the boy stood staring dazedly out into the twilight. Then he gathered his wits together and set to work. He'd make a fight for his life, anyway. Swiftly, he pulled and pushed the drift logs together into a heap. With his knife, he hacked off slender strips for kindling and lighted a circle of fires about his little camp.

It was nearer now, the wolf wailing!

In a panic, Ood-le-uk built his fires roaring high, heaped on the tinder-dry logs.

Down the valley swept the gray horde that was the wolf pack. Before it a slender-legged creature fled away in piteous, desperate leaps. Quite near to Ood-le-uk's fire circle came the hunted and the hunters, then veered, and were swallowed up in the eerie darkness.

They were gone. He was safe—safe for a space, anyway. *Ai,* but the gray killers of the north would come back! They always did. Beyond his fire circle they would squat, waiting, waiting.

And when the blaze flickered low, they'd — Ood-le-uk covered his face with his hands. He did not want to die. He wanted to live, live.

Suddenly he leaped to his feet. The hunt — it was surging back up the valley. Straight, straight toward his refuge it came. He could dimly see a white form plunging on, with wolves at its very heels.

Then all in the space of one astonished breath, a great white buck magnificently cleared the flame barrier, and landed within the glowing circle. The leader wolves, unable to check themselves, plunged headlong into the searing coals and with despairing howls rolled back into the snow.

It was Zha, the boy's own white buck, that had leaped into the safety of the fire circle. Old, forgotten memories of a burning brand in his master's hand, saving him from other wolves, must have awakened in his mind, causing him to brave the sear of flame so greatly feared by all creatures of the wild.

Anyway, here he stood, great sides heaving, a froth of blood-flecked foam at the nostrils. Beautiful, splendid Zha — the wolves had nearly exhausted him.

All that night long the boy and his white buck huddled together within the fire circle. Just beyond, in the shadows, the gray horde squatted on its haunches and waited — as only the wolf pack can wait for its meat. A fearsome, cruel-eyed, white-fanged horde it was.

Through the darkness Ood-le-uk kept the flame barriers roaring high. He dared not do otherwise. Then morning came. The wolves drew in closer. The fire circle began to flare less brightly. Carefully the boy laid a precious stick here and here. And at last there was no more wood. With a sob, Ood-le-uk looked toward the west where home was — the home he would never see again. When these flames burned low, it would be the end. The boy moved near to the white buck. He and Zha, they would die together.

And then, out of the bewilderment of his distress, came a plan — a wild, fantastic plan! Yet anything was better than waiting passively for certain death.

Swiftly, while the protecting flames still flared and roared, the boy made a few preparations, flung aside his heavy *pooksak*. Then, with one spring, he landed astride the white buck's back and clung there.

"Go, Zha, go!" he screamed, jamming his heels into his steed's flanks.

Up, up, like the flight of a bird, rose the startled deer in one wild, splendid leap that cleared fire and wolf circle in its grand sweep.

Away he fled, with the pack racing, full cry, behind.

It was a wild, wild ride. The Eskimo boy clung desperately, swaying this way and that. If he fell, — *ai,* but he must not fall. And he tightened his grip on the buck's shaggy neck ruff.

The great deer ran splendidly. His night, safe within Ood-le-uk's fire circle, had rested those fleet, slender limbs. On and on he sped. Still at his heels hung the pack. He cut through an ice gulch, cunningly doubled back on the snow plains, raced along the smooth sea ice of the shore. He was distancing them! Now he was leaving the white-fanged pack behind! At last, afar off, the killer horde, cheated of its quarry, howled wearily and turned aside to seek after easier meat.

Zha raced on. And Ood-le-uk clung tightly, the glory, the exhilaration of speed surging through his veins. It was wondrous — better than

All that night the boy and his white buck huddled together within the fire circle.

any canter of the old days when Zha was tame. Now they crossed a plain, now they were in rolling hill country, skimming gloriously — then *swoosh,* and Ood-le-uk shot sideways into a snow bank. Valetka's dogs and the two Tschuktschi hunters, waving their spears, had appeared, topping a rise. With a snorted *woof,* the great buck had reared and wheeled in his tracks, spilling his boy rider.

Dazedly Ood-le-uk crawled out of his snow wallow and gazed after the flying form that thundered down an ice canyon. Back to his wild mates skimmed Zha, the buck deer. But, well — he had earned his freedom; he had saved his master's life.

CHAPTER XV

BEYOND THE ICE MOUNTAINS

BOOM-A-BOOM-A-BOOM-A! roared the great drum of the *shaman,* and to its hollow sound was added the wild wailing of old Ir-Kaij, as the witch man rocked and swayed and chanted a fierce prayer to his dread spirit gods. Out from his desert lair, where the tundra began, the aged *schaman* had come to invoke aid for his people. But the spirit gods must have turned a deaf ear to his conjurations and drummings and jumpings, for he brought no help to his tribal kin. The famine held on.

Always, in that land where frozen rivers led to a frozen sea, spring was the most dire season of the year. Hoarded provisions ran lower and lower. Always there was a hunger period before the surge of fish and wild game turned north again. This year the hunger period dragged on interminably. There came no wedge of geese honking north, no sea birds, no seals. Everywhere

was famine. Like a specter it stalked through Igirka and took its toll of the Tschuktschi settlers. To the south of the Tschuktschi, the ancient villages of the flat-faced Onkilon, the native sea people, felt also the hunger misery. It was a man from these Onkilon that the hunters of Igirka came upon one day, fallen half frozen and scarce alive in the trail that led up from the south. The hunters themselves were very far from home. In this time of the Great Hunger, each day the villagers shouldered spears and tramped out ever-widening circles in search of meat — and there was none. The frozen wastes of the snow plains stretched before them, bare and empty. The red-legged snow bird, the deer, the white hare were gone. That gray death of the North, the wolf horde, had swept down many sleeps ago, killing and driving all before it. *Illah-uj!* It was cruel! Instead of meat, the hunters found only a starving old man to carry home with them — another mouth to feed. And at that, scarce a seal-hide bag of provisions left in all Igirka Village.

The hunters lugged the old one into the leather home tent of Valetka the *Kamakai*. When he came out of his hunger stupor, under the hearten-

ing trickle of weak soup that Lalaj poured down him, he mumbled endless words and thrashed about with his arms and made many signs. To the Tschuktschi ear the guttural dialect of the Onkilon was not entirely understandable. But the villagers caught a word here, a phrase there, and out of the jumble pieced together something.

The old one, so it seemed, was named Yarani and was a chieftain in some Onkilon settlement far down the coast. He had started north, but his hunger-weakened dogs had died on the trail. He, himself, had come near to death's door as he had struggled on foot toward the north, always toward the north, for in that direction lay a place of much meat, meat for his people, meat for all the people of the coast.

The villagers tapped their foreheads and murmured. "He is old and mindless," they said among themselves. "Better that he had died before we found him. Now we shall have to feed him. But soon we will all be dead men anyway. There will be naught of food here."

Despite what men said about him, Yarani, weazened skeleton that he was, prostrate among

the bed skins of a stranger's hut, babbled valiantly on about "meat, a place of much meat!"

Later in that day, as he regained more of his spent strength, the old one drew a strange thing from the sleeve pouch of his ragged *kamleja.* It was a flat slab of ivory engraved with a maze of tiny, winding lines. Deep into the cuts had been rubbed soot of seal oil so that the design lay blackly etched against the bit of ivory.

"The map," muttered the old one, "the map that leads to that unknown frozen land to the north of the River Volima. Meat is there."

Valetka the *Kamakai,* whose leg had been half crushed in a recent snow avalanche while off on a fruitless hunt, limped forward and took the strange map into his own hand, his eyes lighting as he gazed upon it.

Only the *Kamakai* and his own family and the stranger were in the hut now. The village huntsmen had departed, most of them mere pale specters wandering home to dwellings where remained little enough to alleviate their hunger misery.

Valetka the Chieftain's household fared no better than any other in that unhappy village.

Like all primitive folk of the North country, be they high or low, it was share and share alike as long as food was to be had. The once plump, copper-colored Keku was now a thing of skin and bones, crawling over the floor, weakly searching for scraps of leather, old bones, anything to thrust into her hungry little mouth. Jana and Tass fought over a piece of sinew, waving their skinny arms in the air and screaming at each other, only in the end to divide the morsel and cry on each other's shoulders in their misery. Lalaj was stirring in the cook pot something that was mostly snow moss and water.

Everywhere was hunger, yet on the bed skins the stranger muttered on about a land of plenty.

"Up beyond the Volima there is meat," continually reiterated the harsh old voice. "Meat a plenty. Many suns ago, in a time of the great hunger, our father's fathers found food there. Here is the trail they followed." He ran a lean finger down the black lines on the ivory map. "Are there no strong hunters left, none left to follow the North trail? Send two, send one even, to bring meat for us all," the wavering old voice

struggled on. "Soon it will be too late. Your people, my people also — all will be gone."

"He raves," whispered Ood-le-uk pityingly, as from his corner he watched the old one toss and moan. "He sees strange visions born of the hunger madness."

"Perhaps — and yet — " Valetka weighed the ivory piece in his hand, studied it. "I have heard strange tales like this before of the land beyond the Volima. The old one may tell of no dream, but the truth. It is a chance. In the time of great hunger, one must take chances."

Like a priest chanting some invocation, the Tschuktschi Chieftain began murmuring words, half to himself, half aloud:

"I am the *Kamakai* of the Tschuktschi.
I have led my people,
But my limbs are broken.
Age is upon me.
I lead no more.
My son that comes after me,
He shall lead.
He shall find meat for his people.
He shall follow the trail of the stranger — "

"*Na, na!*" Young Etel sprang to his feet. "It is an evil trail. Beyond the Volima is *Mek-suah,*

the spirit land. To go there is death, death! I cannot walk into spirit death. Let me die here with my own people." And Etel fell to shivering and turned his face to the skin wall of the *namet*.

"That Onkilon of long ago crossed into the land beyond the Volima and lived. It is your duty to save your people; you are the son of the chieftain. But," and he drew himself up fiercely, "if you fear too much, I, with my feeble strength, I will go!"

"Better for none to go!" moaned Etel. "I fear not death, but I fear the spirits."

In his own corner, Ood-le-uk shivered down into a mere huddle within his fur jacket. Unnamable terrors surged through his brain. And he had thought he was done with such dread. For year upon year this brown-skinned Eskimo had battled against the tremors that from baby days had beset his soul. Year by year he had made slow conquest of his weakness. First victory had come to him back at that long-ago whale hunt when he had crossed black, rotten ice to carry food to his own home village. One victory had led to another. So he had conquered fear of loneliness in his ice-bound exile, conquered fear of the *sha-*

man's knife, fear of wolf and bear and land journey and water journey. But now in the end, spirit fear rode him and crushed him back into nothingness.

If it were Etel's duty to follow that fearsome trail after meat, so much so was it his duty also. These Tschuktschi had fed and clothed him, taken him a stranger and made a brother of him. Yet he made no offer to go on this necessary, weird, dreadful journey. Fear closed his lips. Fear shriveled his very soul.

From the bed pallet, the weazened old Onkilon chieftain began to mumble afresh. He upreared himself among the robes, drew still another object from out of his pouch. This time it was a wooden packet. He opened it, spread its contents on his palm — a bit of crossed metal.

"To one that goes, I give my strong amulet, my amulet of great luck. In my youth I traveled far, came to the place of the white missioner who baptizes and gives crosses. He said, 'The cross makes all men love, all men willing to live or die for another man.' Let some one take the cross . . . it gives strength . . ."

Ood-le-uk the Eskimo bowed his head. His

hand reached into his garment and touched his own packet of the cross that hung about his neck. The words of the old missioner of Ostrownoje came back to him. "The cross stands for love. To love another better than self, to give one's life for another, if need be. Loves casts out fear."

A sudden decision burned through his mind. He stood up on his feet, sturdy and strong despite the hunger that gnawed beneath his ribs. His fears seemed to have slipped from him.

"I will go," he said with finality.

Some one sidled up close beside him, shoulder touching shoulder. "I — then I go too," said Etel in a voice that began as a quaver, then ended strong and clear.

Long did Valetka study with the two boys the winding marks upon the ivory map, until its turnings were as indelible in his mind as in theirs. In spirit, anyway, he was going with them on this strange journey. Then he led them to the back of the hut. Lifting the floor robe, he dug and clawed into the hard-packed earth and finally brought to light a small leather sack containing a few dried fish and some strips of thick walrus hide.

"The last of the food — take it." The man began tying up the deer-hide sack.

But the youths stopped him, took only some small portion of the food. They were physically stronger than those left behind. Somehow they must eke along existence on the few handfuls they allowed themselves to take.

Before dawn of day the start was made. Valetka's lean dog team was harnessed to a long, light sledge. Ood-le-uk and Etel plodded alongside, softly shouting, "*Huk! Huk!*" And before the village awakened from its troubled sleep, they and their dogs had disappeared among the ice hummocks.

All that day the boys pushed on through the rough ice. They went silently, for they were headed for dread *Mek-suah,* land of the spirits. All manner of weird tales came to mind. Shiveringly, Ood-le-uk and Etel remembered how at nights, sitting around the bright fire flares of bones soaked in oil, the villagers used to listen to old Ir-Kaij tell wild tales of the giants who fought each other with thunderbolts and uprooted mountains in their battles.

By nightfall the boys had come to a wide gla-

cier and camped in a crevice along its side. After the meager rations had been portioned out, they set to building a snow hut as a shelter. Into this, they and the dogs crawled and huddled together for warmth. Overhead, the ghostly streamers of the northern lights glimmered coldly. From afar, across frozen land and sea, came the wolf wailing. Ood-le-uk and Etel shivered in their sleep, and the dogs growled low and the hair stood up on their necks. But that night no harm befell.

At first peep of Arctic dawn they were under way again, struggling along the trail of the ancient map that the old man of the Onkilon had brought to them. For a fact, the trail of the ivory map was terrible enough to be leading into some land of devils. It wound across *tarni*, those strange, fearful glaciers of Siberia where the ice is black and rotten. It edged ravines haunted by furious and irresistible gusts of wind common in this country and which often hurled men and dogs together down a precipice. Yet in spite of all things, the two youths went still to the north on their strange quest, traveling into an icebound land after some mysterious food supply, the nature of which not even the old Onkilon chieftain

himself knew with any exactitude. He knew only the traditions told that in times long gone men followed the Volima north and came back bearing meat, much meat.

After the first night, the boys were always too weary to build a sheltering hut. Some snow hollow or gully sufficed for them to stumble into for a few hours of rest. Then they would creep out to plod weakly on and on.

At last the *tarni* glacier ice was left behind, and they were struggling up the frozen mountains of an unknown land. In a snowslide most of their remaining scant supplies were lost. Provisions ran low, gave out entirely. After that, progress became a walking nightmare. The hunger sickness came upon Etel, and he could walk no more. Ood-le-uk wrapped his foster brother in the sleeping robe and bound him to the sledge. On he and the poor, thin dogs went, stumbling, falling, struggling up to push forward.

But on that day when they had progressed beyond the frozen mouth of the Volima, across sea ice to an ice-locked island, Ood-le-uk the Eskimo thought that more than hunger madness was upon him.

Crossing a low line of hills into the interior of that island, they came to the brink of a basin — a vast depression chiseled by storm and water through rock shale and frozen gravel. Ood-le-uk and his little cavalcade descended, and behold, they were in a dreadful valley of dry bones. Great skeletons and sightless animal skulls strewed the place. Most dreadful of all was a huge, shaggy creature deeply embedded in a block of clear ice. The monster's brow loomed up like some granite dome, and from it descended a wrinkled trunk and two ivory tusks like streams of a glacier torrent. Behind these uprose the mammoth body, set upon four legs that could straddle a whole Siberian hut. A dark and towering mass it was, with eyes that seemed to see and ears that seemed to hear. A creature the like of which Ood-le-uk had never before seen. It was neither wolf nor bear, walrus nor whale.

Ood-le-uk fell down in the snow and covered his eyes. He had the awful feeling that he had died and gone to another world. How long he lay there, he never knew. But at last he roused. All was quiet and peaceful about him. The bones lay still and white, half buried in the wind-swept snow. The frozen mammoth was calm and benign

in his sheath of ice. His blank eyes stared down upon the world as they had stared for thousands of years. He was a relic of that far-gone age when the tropic-loving elephant roamed at will in what are now Arctic regions. Some unknown accident of nature had thrust him, whole and perfect, into his tomb of ice.

A strange peace descended upon Ood-le-uk. He could not know the why nor where of this frozen monster. At least, though, this was not spirit land, but merely a part of his own cold world. With a new confidence, he got to his feet and stumbled stiffly about.

Then a startling fact was revealed. Part of the creature was gone, — a great hind quarter had been cut away, leaving a huge, ragged scar on his side.

Of a sudden, it came to Ood-le-uk that here it was that the Onkilon chieftain's father's father had found meat for a starving people.

Here Ood-le-uk made his camp. He toiled mightily with spear and knife, splitting away the ice. At last he uncovered meat, cold and sweet as though only yesterday it had been packed away, instead of some thousands of years ago.

With food and warmth the hunger madness

left Etel. The feeble skeletons that had been sledge dogs ate enormously and in time regained much of their strength.

But here in this strange valley lay more than food; here lay wealth for those who chose to take it. All about in the frozen rubble were scattered not only dry bones of many a mammoth, but also vast quantities of mammoth ivory, tusks of the huge, long-gone pachyderms. Ood-le-uk and Etel could scarce believe their eyes for the richness they had stumbled into. Back at the Ostrownoje Fair, Russian traders had traded them cloth and beads, kettles, knives, embroideries, for one ivory tusk. And here at their feet lay ten, twenty, perhaps a hundred and more huge, curving tusks of the precious ivory. Transported across the tundra to the Russian fortress town of Ostrownoje, these many tusks of mammoth ivory would bring wealth, not to the few, but to the whole tribal settlement of the Tschuktschi of Igirka by the Sea.

Visions of trade ivory and Ostrownoje had to be put aside for the present, however, for the sake of plans for famine relief. When the boys had cut off a ton or more of meat and cached it in an

ice cave, they felt that they must get back to the village where there was such dire need of food. But first they packed snow about the remaining portions of the mammoth and iced it down firmly with much water. Such a valuable food supply must be kept safe from marauding wolf or bear.

Then the long sledge was loaded with chunks of meat held in place with thongs of the monster's shaggy hide. The dogs were harnessed, and the journey to the village was begun. But now the trail of the ivory map did not seem so hard. Boys and dogs had eaten and were full. And besides, they were homeward bound.

In just five sleeps, the long sledge and its load of food came swiftly across the frozen land and into the snow plains above the starving village of Igirka.

Straining ears of famished ones there must have heard footsteps in the snow, creak of sledge runners, for when the precious load was driven down into the settlement, gaunt women had ready their pots of stone or iron, scoured and waiting for the strange meat that came down by the north trail.

After the famine, the Tschuktschi ate. But they were not gluttons. Part of that sledge load of meat was sent on down the south trail to that village of the flat-faced Onkilon people where hunger stalked also.

In Igirka the Feast of the Famine Breaking lasted a day and a night. After the eating came the making of songs.

> "Ood-le-uk and Etel departed boys;
> They came back men and heroes.
> They conquered famine.
> They conquered fear."

So chanted old Ir-Kaij the *shaman,* to the boom of his drum with its rattling rings of brass and tin. He sang it even of Ood-le-uk, the outlander, whom he had hated, but whose courage had made him now a blood brother of the tribe.

CHAPTER XVI

MAKING OF THE BIDAR

TWICE in the two years following that strange journey up into the ivory treasure vault beyond the frozen Volima did Ood-le-uk and his Tschuktschi friends go with the caravan of Kotschal to Ostrownoje and the Great Fair. More valuable than furs, than walrus hide and bone and teeth, than whale oil, even, were the massive ivory tusks transported down from the land of the entombed mammoths. Elephant ivory was bartered for reindeer herds and sledges and Russian trade goods. Wealth, such as the Arctic counts wealth, came again to the Tschuktschi settlement of Igirka.

One piece of ivory, however, Ood-le-uk the Eskimo persistently refused to barter, even though the Russian merchants offered him trade goods out of all proportion to the size of the piece. This was the precious, green-tinted bit of walrus tusk that had come with Ood-le-uk across

the far waters and upon which he had cut the picture-history of his travels.

From each of these last trips to the Russian trade post with its many marvels, Ood-le-uk had brought costly gifts for his Tschuktschi foster parents and gifts for the three small daughters of Lalaj — Russian *kitajka* or house robes made of cloth, caps embroidered in gold thread, forehead bands set with coins and bangles.

He brought other things, too, — finery and beads that he gave not away but hoarded in a secret pack thrust down at the bottom of some sledge load. They were things suitable for his own young sisters and brothers back in the far-away land, he knew not where.

More and more often, as he grew older, his mind turned back to the days of his childhood, the cozy underground home in the Alaskan village, the games and the journeys and the hunts of which he had been a part. And a great longing grew in Ood-le-uk's heart to give to his people the benefit of the things he had learned.

Then one day, after a great storm had hurled itself madly against the Siberian shore, driving landward in its wake waves and battered icebergs

and all manner of drift, Etel brought to Ood-le-uk an object the sea had cast up. This thing out of the drift was merely a length of pine log with a stone axe blade thrust into it. But the sight wrenched Ood-le-uk's heart with homesickness. Here was just such a primitive blade as his own Eskimo tribesmen used — such a blade as old Ituk or boisterous, sturdy Cousin Putnuk, or Katok, his own brave father, might have wielded. Yea, on the axe haft were lines scratched in a crude design, the bear's head — the sign that his own tribal village used.

Longings welled up through Ood-le-uk. His own people—if only he could see them again! He had crossed the great waters in safety. And now this little stone axe in a log for a raft had come to him like a message from his own. His longings set him to wondering. But no, it was tempting fate to dream such wild dreams. Man was a land animal, daring at his most to creep in his frail boats close along the shelving shore of bay or river. *Chut,* man was no sea creature, like a fish or a seal, to be risking his neck out among the vast unknown waterways.

The Siberian coastal storm brought other

things ashore than shattered drift ice and logs.

The screaming and squawking of gulls circling above a land point that jutted out into the sea, revealed a new treasure cast up out of the deep. This was a great, dead bowhead swept ashore in the wave wash and left behind as the waters receded. Here was meat, tons of it, and a vast thick hide and a bony framework useful for every building purpose under the sun.

Whale meat was a marvelous delicacy. The great tail, the silvery white under part, the thick juicy fat or blubber — these were portions to be wrangled over, *ai,* even fought over. But Ood-le-uk seemed a deal more interested in securing portions of hide instead of portions of meat. For other men's share in the thick whaleskin he bartered a part of his wealth of Russian trade goods. And still other goods he bartered for man labor upon a long, broad framework of bone and for woman labor upon much whaleskin stitched together in close, water-tight seams.

By degrees the thing grew under Ood-le-uk's planning until at last there was completed that which he had long dreamed of, the big bidar.

It was a craft far larger than any of the little, land-hugging canoes that had heretofore traveled Siberian coastal waters. It was long and broad and staunchly braced in its framework of whale bone, thong knotted into place. At one end was a covered hatch where provision bags could be stored. Amidships was set a mast and a square whaleskin sail. The big bidar could carry twenty oarsmen and their sleeping bags and their water bottles of tanned sealskin.

After its launching, when it rode the waters of the bay serenely, the long boat set forth on a voyage of adventure out into the wide, unknown spaces of the cold northern sea. In it went Oodle-uk and Etel, his tribal blood brother, sixteen other adventurers from the Tschuktschi village, and two small, brown, flat-faced Onkilon men from the settlement to the south.

For his primitive voyage of exploration, Oodle-uk had no charts, no instruments of direction. He traveled merely on the fact that as the rising sun had been behind his back when that long-ago storm had drifted him away from the land of his people, so must the rising sun be his guide mark to lead him home again.

Under wind and oars, the bidar bore down steadily to the east, but instead of finding his homeland, the jagged rocks of Gwosdew Islands were what Ood-le-uk sailed into. Sharp reefs cut an ugly hole in the boat bottom, and she soon would have foundered had not all hands leaped out into the shallows and dragged her ashore. Here a camp had to be made till hunters could trap a seal and those sailors of the nimblest fingers could sew a patch of sealskin with a sinew thread into the bidar's torn bottom.

This might have been the end of the journey had not Ood-le-uk's sharp eyes seen and noted well one small, seemingly insignificant circumstance. More than half the food was gone. No water could be found in the rocky knoll in mid-sea to replenish the skin jugs. Even the stoutest hearts began to quail. It seemed better for men who loved life to turn back upon adventure and the rising sun and to head again for the shores of Siberia.

Then it was that Ood-le-uk saw the raven. With a hoarse *caw-caw-awk* this small, black bird had flown up from an island cliff and winged it — not west towards Siberia, but straight into the east. "Where the raven flies, there is land," so

She soon would have foundered had not all hands leaped out . . . and dragged her ashore.

runs a proverb of the North People. And because of the raven's flight, the adventurers of the big bidar were willing to set sail once more on and on into the unknown.

Three sleeps later, land loomed dimly to the east, a place of high mountains and vast stretches lost in the sea mists to the north and to the south. It was land, but not the homeland Ood-le-uk sought. Here were great rivers flowing down to the sea between green banks and amid tall trees. The Eskimo youth knew only that Alaska of snows and bare headlands and now and then some gnarled and stunted trees growing close to the ground.

To the north he now turned the boat. For if they were anywhere on this land, his tribesmen would be to the north. Then they came into waters that were vaguely familiar. Was it here that many suns ago he and Putnuk had hunted seal in Eskimo kayaks? Was yonder black point the Rock-of-the-Hole, the rock where the Raven God, according to his father's old tale, had anchored the land mass at the beginning of the world?

Then of a morning as the boatmen swept north and into a long arm of the sea that deeply in-

dented the land, Ood-le-uk sighted beloved round-topped Eskimo huts, coming closer, sighted a girl fishing from a little oomiak.

This one was his own sister, Illi, the brown-faced, though of course he knew it not, for she had grown up, clear out of his recollection.

As for the girl, when she sighted the first sail-boat her slant, black eyes had ever set upon, she gave a scream and thought she was having the megrims and seeing ghost visions. Her fishing line, ivory fishhook and all, went overboard, and she rowed for land and dashed up the shore — still screaming.

At that the whole village of round-topped huts burst into life, and out of them poured a startling array of Eskimo men, women, children, and dogs — everything rushing down toward the water edge and this new excitement.

An old chieftain, moving stiffly, led the way. Behind him came a small, round-faced woman in neat little Eskimo pants and with many sorrow lines graven on her kindly countenance. With a sudden low cry, this one rushed straight out into the icy waters, knee-deep, waist-deep, pressing frantically onward toward the boat.

"My Ood-le-uk, my little lost Ood-le-uk!" was her cry.

She might have waded right on in, clear over her head, had not "little lost Ood-le-uk", now a strapping, bronze-skinned voyager, signaled his oarsmen and sped his craft swiftly forward to meet Mother Nup-su. She was both laughing and crying for very happiness as his strong arms swept her up and aboard his valiant craft that had crossed Bering Sea and brought Ood-le-uk the Wanderer home to his people.

The long-ago drift ice had swept him off a weakling. The boat his own hands had designed had brought him back a man grown, and a man brave enough to be a leader among men. For by the amulet of the little metal cross that still lay against his heart, he had conquered fear.

On the shore, Father Katok and all his tribe proudly welcomed Ood-le-uk and Etel and the Siberian voyagers. What questions they asked! Where had their lost Ood-le-uk been all these years? How far had he wandered? What had he seen? As Ood-le-uk told the tale of his drifting to another land, his tribe folk exclaimed over and over again at his strange adventures. They had

to feel of his new-style clothing, touch gently his wonderful boat that he had made to come voyaging home in.

That night Katok the Chief gave a great feast in honor of the home-coming of this lost son who had returned from across the waters and had brought with him his friends from that far land. Never had the village of Tekelerik seen such a feast. It was greater than the Feast of the Whale Hunt, greater even than the yearly Feast of Greeting Day after the Winter Night. Before the visitors were set out all manner of Alaskan delicacies — sweet back fat of caribou and bear steaks and thick slices of beluga meat. There were frozen fish and marrow sticks and ptarmigan and red-legged dovekie ducks.

Everybody in the village, great and small, was at the feast, and there was food enough for every one to have all he could hold — and some to carry home.

As was the custom, Ood-le-uk and Etel and the long-robed Siberian tribesmen as guests had places of honor in the man row — which is the first row around the food pots.

The women, as was also Eskimo custom, sat

back on the outer edge of the circle and took what food their men handed out to them. Wrinkled Mother Nup-su sat right behind her Ood-le-uk, and the sweetest of back fat and juiciest of whale meat was handed out to her. The little brown Eskimo woman was happy, more than happy. Her son that was lost had come back to her.

But through Mother Nup-su's happiness shot now and then a tiny tremble of questioning. Her son was come home — but would he stay? Suppose he had now the wandering in his blood? Suppose — But Mother Nup-su had no more time for little trembles of inward questionings now. The feast was coming to a glorious close. Ood-le-uk now stood up and began to distribute among his tribesmen the gifts he had brought them, gifts, the strangeness of which made their slant eyes half pop from their heads — Russian cloth, knives of polished metal, beads and pots and sugar that tasted like naught the Eskimo had ever put tongue to before.

CHAPTER XVII

WHALESKIN SAIL

IT was happiness for Ood-le-uk to begin to live again the life of his own tribespeople. He enjoyed showing Etel and his other Tschuktschi friends the Eskimo way of the hunt. Because the summer still held, they could fish out in the open water lanes between the drift ice, could visit that old summer camping ground of the tribe, the Rock-of-the-Hole, which they had passed on their way up the coast. It was good to join in the hospitable Eskimo custom of helping dig out the *innies* for the visitors to live in. It was good to eat again the frozen fish and the sticks of marrow that came out of Mother Nupsu's little tunnel of a storehouse.

All the old homely things were happiness for a while; then a great restlessness fell upon Ood-le-uk. He found that he could not settle back down to the narrow, prescribed seasonal wander-

ings of his tribe — the fishing on the nearest ice edge, the hunting of a dog march inland.

Far spaces called him. A strange longing, not unmingled with fear, filled his heart. Why could not he be satisfied with things as they were — with the old tribal life? But because he had traveled far and learned much, there grew in him a steady urge to keep on learning.

He traded strips of cloth, bits of metal, for a dog here, for a dog there, and gathered to himself the finest team of harness huskies he could lay hands on. By the same barter method he acquired a great sled, long and strong, and yet light.

When the winter snow crust settled firm and hard, Ood-le-uk took to wandering off with Etel on far journeys. He began visiting among strange tribes — a dangerous visiting, for one took one's life in the hands and risked getting a spear in the chest for treading other folk's hunting grounds. But since Ood-le-uk wanted so earnestly to know how other Eskimo tribes lived and hunted and what they made out of their Arctic resources of bone and skins and ivory and feathers — why, he took the risk! He protected himself in a small measure, as he approached

strangers, by giving the Arctic peace sign. This was nothing more or less than a laying down of weapons on the snow and marching forward, arms up, palms out, a primitive pantomime meaning, "See, I carry no spear. I come in friendship." The Great Spirit must have favored Ood-le-uk on these wanderings, for instead of marching up to quarrelsome strangers, who might have popped a spear into him, peace sign or not, he had the luck to meet only rather friendly folk.

Through much traveling, Ood-le-uk came to stay in many different kinds of *innies*. Besides his own sea-coast tribes, he came to know many inland peoples, such as the Fox Tribe, the Caribou Nomads, the Barren Land Tribes. At nights around the potstone lamp, he traded Siberian songs and stories for the tribal yarns and chants of these far-distant tribes of his own race. He traded precious bits of Siberian and Russian stuffs for a bulk of furs and hides. His long sled always went home heavy-laden, but he left satisfaction behind him, for he had brought to these dwellers of the snow inlands a glimpse of another part of the world, a knowledge of people other than themselves.

All through the winter, while the hard-packed snow fields served well for inland traveling, Ood-le-uk kept to his trade journey, till back at the home village he had a whole hut well filled with furs and ivory and strange, carved bone.

When spring came, however, and the ice floes broke and the whale paths opened up into the Arctic waters, Ood-le-uk ceased his trading and turned eagerly to the proper tribal seasonal work of whale hunting. The whale run was plentiful this year. Instead of capturing a mere one or two of the great creatures, the little whaling camp of Ood-le-uk's tribe harpooned and towed to the ice edge five great bowheads.

Such vast luck had to be celebrated extensively with a long-drawn-out festival of songs and games and dancing to the beating of many drums, celebrated with a feasting for many days on those most tender delicacies of whale meat — the tail, the fin, and the skin from the jaws.

On the heels of the feasting followed a period of terrifically hard labor. Ood-le-uk the Wanderer had persuaded his tribesmen to save many great strips of the fine, strong whaleskin to be built into long boats patterned after his own big

bidar. Through the summer the work went forward on three fine boats. With a weather eye cocked often to the north, watching for that white line of down-drifting ice that would mean winter and the sea blocked for nine long months, Ood-le-uk drove the work. Shape the bone frames, bind the thong knots swiftly, push the bone awl, and pull the bone needle with ceaseless haste — hurry, hurry with making of whaleskin cover and whaleskin sail!

At last they were done, three splendidly strong-framed, tight-seamed big bidars patterned after Ood-le-uk's own long boat. With much shouting the whole little fleet was launched out on the face of the waters. It was a shouting mixed with wailing, though, for along with Ood-le-uk and Etel and their Siberian oarsmen, were now going Alaskans, a man from nearly every *innie* in Tekelerik Village. The wails of their women drifted out to sea after these ones going on a new, wild journey. But in the heart of Ood-le-uk, who had now already twice crossed the sea and still lived to tell the tale, there was no room for fear. There was room only for joyful excitement.

In the bidar fleet was packed away the stores

of furs and all manner of Alaskan trade goods that Ood-le-uk had been gathering all winter. It was a weight that bore the boats down low to the water. But for all their load, they rode the waves neatly, and with big sails of whaleskin a-boom, they slipped out of the sheltered arm of the sea that was Onzebue Sound, followed the coast down for many days; then when they had passed a great, high point of land that jutted out into the sea, they headed straight forward into the place of the setting sun.

Ood-le-uk, leading the way in his own tried and true craft, wisely skirted the reefs of the Gwosdew Isles and kept on and on into the west.

Then at sunset of a day, the little fleet glimpsed a ragged point of land that stuck straight up out of the water. As the boats swept forward under speed of both oars and sails, the land point grew and grew in size, till all of a sudden Ood-le-uk found that he was sailing into the familiar little bay at the foot of the mighty headland of East Cape. He and Etel and the other Tschuktschi voyagers had come home again to the village of Igirka. There was a mighty reunion of the so-

well-known ones, and a welcome for the Eskimo tribesmen who had come with Ood-le-uk.

As soon as the greetings were over, Ood-le-uk began to ask anxiously, "Are we in time? Have they come yet, the traders from the Great Fair?"

Valetka the *Kamakai* smiled broadly and waved an arm toward the west. "Over there now is our brother, Kotschal the Trader — on his way here with many sledge loads of fine goods. So a messenger sped on ahead to bring us the word."

The message was a true one. Within another day came the uproar of many herdsmen shouting, horns blowing, dogs barking, *clap-clatter* of reindeer hoofs, and into the East Cape village poured the travel train of Kotschal's nomads. And soon, right down on the shore edge, a great bartering was going forward. Alaskan white foxskins, beaver, and otter, Alaskan bone beads and birdskins and walrus ivory were traded for Russian cloth and fine knives and slim, metal needles and pots and colored beads and, *ola,* the sugar that tasted so deliciously queer!

The trade and barter, all perforce had to be accomplished quickly, for the white line of win-

ter ice was already being glimpsed to the north. Soon Ood-le-uk and his Eskimos bade farewell to their Tschuktschi friends, a sad farewell to Etel, and boarded the bidar fleet, and set sail on the homeward voyage.

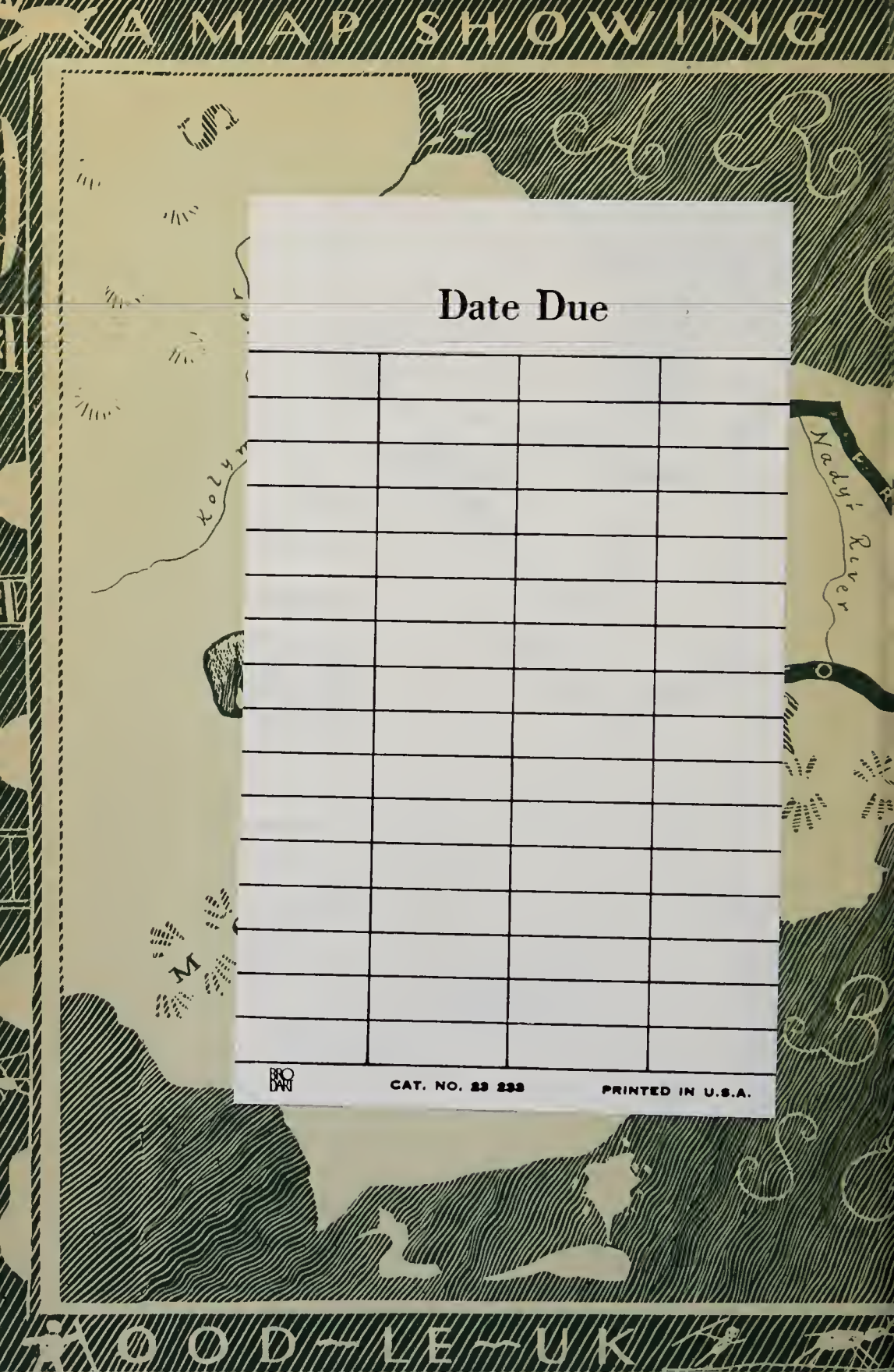
That was merely the beginning. In after years, the seacoast Eskimos made other boats patterned after the first big bidar. The trade fleet, now grown to sizable proportions, began to make regular trips across the cold, stormy waters of the Bering Sea that lies between Asia and America. And Ood-le-uk the Wanderer it was, who in the old, old days, before the white men's boats ever came through Bering Straits, opened up the rich trade-and-barter commerce between Siberia and Alaska.

Each year, before the brief Arctic summer closed and the ice swept down from the north to block the sea with bergs, this whaleskin trade fleet, with square, primitive whaleskin sails and strong brown arms to row, swept across the waters to Siberia to get a load of Russian trade goods to carry back to Alaska.

High up on the shores of Onzebue Sound, there now began to be held a trade fair, a "Little Ostrownoje", patterned after that great trade festival of the Siberian cold. Hither began to come those wild inland tribes with which Ood-le-uk had already made contact. These came shyly trecking down by dog sledge, packing in far Northern America's contribution to this first link in world trade. Along with many rich pelts were brought strange, warm, birdskin *kapetas,* or covers, skin garments beaded in queer tribal designs, cups made of musk-ox horn, colored stones to be powdered up into a sort of paint. All these things, of which they had plenty, the Alaskan tribes were glad to trade for the things of which they had none — the far-traveled Russian wares.

With the coming of every summer, Ood-le-uk had full loads for all his boats to freight across to Siberia. Each year he brought back to his little, wrinkled mother many strange and rare gifts that had traveled from the white man's fair all the way to the edge of Asia. But Nup-su's mother heart treasured most of all Ood-le-uk's first gift brought to her from across the sea — the

piece of green ivory carved with Ood-le-uk's adventures. For from these bold, strong carvings cut on the walrus tusk, the mother heart could read the history of how Ood-le-uk the Weakling developed into Ood-le-uk the Leader of Men.



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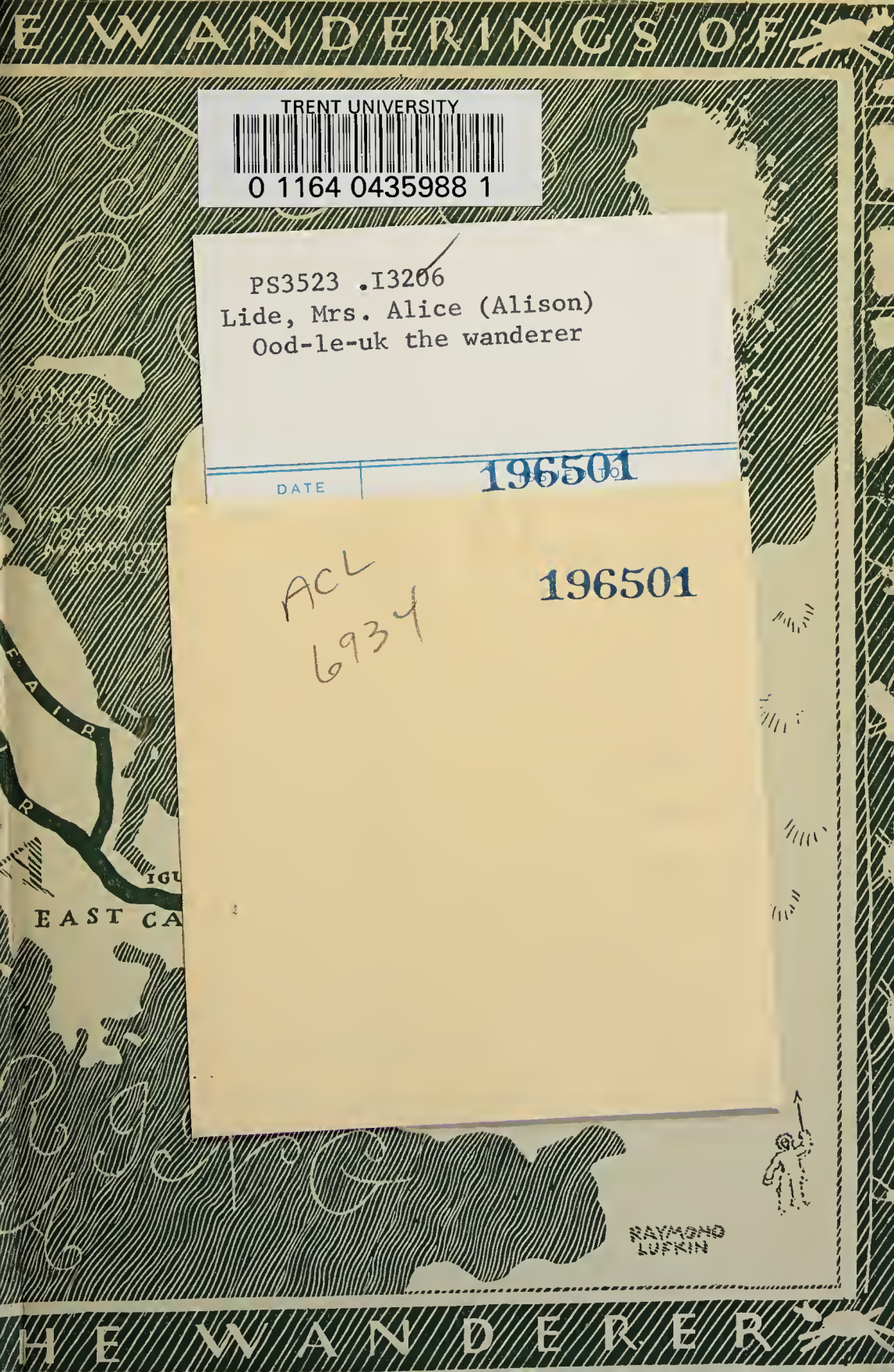

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